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WHO COMES AFTER THE SUBJECT

If one did not know that, in history, there are in fact *actual* subjects ; that it is indeed a question (probably even a necessity) of trying to discern their forms ; and finally that through what is coming to an end something else may be searching for itself, which already calls for actual subjects other than all those we have known up to now : if one did not know or believe all of this, one would simply have rejected the question « Who comes after the subject? » — a question whose formulation seems calculated to render it foreign to philosophical interrogation. « Who comes? » is a messianic question, and probably, more specifically, a catholic one.

First of all, there is a presupposition, perhaps unintentional, in the given formulation, according to which the « *subjec* » would already have been a « who ». However, whether it is understood as transcendental *subjectivity* or as the historical *subjectum* of modernity, the subject has never been a « who », it has always been a « what ». In the first sense — that is, as *Ego cogito cogitata mea* — the subject *in its text* has never been a someone (René, for example, « in his bed »). Unless one mistakes Descartes for Montaigne. Descartes instead took himself for Ausonius and *witnessed* his own thinking as something sent to him in a dream by the Holy Spirit. Or else he viewed it as a fable, the making of an automaton the size of the world, the baroque machine generalized — including the theoretical device of the *Cogito* (the hyperbolic fulcrum of an infinite Archimedean lever) as well as that of the « divine veracity » (veracity rather than truth, word rather than discourse : a word outside of discourse in order to seal discourse). Descartes, the Jesuit.

Now if, on the one hand, the *Cogito* was never a somebody, if it was—and, according to me, deliberately — an ontological puppet, whose inventor at the same time sketched a new figure of the philosopher as transcendental-talking ventriloquist, on the other hand, the historical *subjectum* that characterized Modern Times [*Les Temps Modernes*], more ancient and more profound than the alleged subject of philosophers, was not something that could be inscribed under the heading « who ». On the contrary, this *subjectum* was inscribed by Marx under the figure of Capital and by Heidegger under that of the essence of modern technology. As such, it is a matrix for all practice, a Sending of Being, that must be considered as much logic of the general equivalent as a logic of « Gegenstand » and « Bestand ». This Grand *Form fabricated* the « subject, » as rational and productive subject, as politic and literary subject, as psychological and creative subject — and, finally, from Colbert to all the Bouvards and Pécuchets of yesterday, today and tomorrow, as an indefinitely repeated element of the grand bourgeois « They ».

Second, one must find out in which sense the question is admissible, by eliminating all the senses in which it is not :

— by eliminating the false-who of the (human) « person, » the person who, since 1781, is no more than the metaphysical hypostasis of the logical identity of the « Ich Denke » ;

— by eliminating the false-who of the speculative and rational God, where the relation between a principle and its concepts is taken for an intelligible reality ;

— by eliminating the false-who of the Christian God. For if one takes away from him all that simply belongs to the ideal of pure reason, what remains is either nothing but the clerical swindle of the « resurrection » that transformed a prophet into a new god or something Jewish and not Christian ;

— by eliminating the false-who of what one calls « the gods, » which are forms of the world, forms of the « what » ;

— finally by eliminating (and this elimination is the inverse of all the previous ones) from the unfigurable figure of the « true god » (granted that such a possibility ought to be left open) all the characteristics of the « who, » that would immediately make it a false-god. For the « who » is the *je meines* of *Dasein* ; it is essentially finite (mortal in the Greek sense), and is always conceived in the form of the « they » ; in short, it is absolutely unworthy of the « true god ». Apart from such characteristics, we think strictly nothing under the word « who, » that is, under the word *Dasein*. There is a limit to a thinking whose two sides do *not* communicate, or rather that does not have *two* sides at all, but only one : the limited side. The gesture of negative theology is thus inexorably impious, and cannot leave the universe of meaning, even though it desires (and believes itself able) either to drive it beyond any limit or to « empty » it. We do not repeat such an operation in our last elimination : in an absolutely savage and particularly superstitious gesture, we put down a gift of milk and fruits on the threshold (it doesn't matter where) of the grand animal that is stronger than we are. After which, we must run away, laughing.

The only « who » is thus the one, the actual (we mean historical) one, who comes from the fact that *Dasein*'s form is the « *je meines* » — he immediately poses the question of knowing whether he is two or one (or else « dual ») inasmuch as the « mine » is « each time » that of a singular and *individual* existence (this is obviously not the right term, but a designative marker that essentially belies what it designates) and inasmuch as this singularity nevertheless always proceeds from a *being with* (*Mit-sein*).

There is, however, a truth that is older than this question of the individual or common character (or : the individual *and* common character, for the « dual » case envisaged above is certainly the effective case) of the « each time mine » of *Dasein*. What has to be established is certainly not that existence would in any case belong to a « me ». The deduction is precisely the opposite : existence is older than any « me » (this is why elephants are venerable monumental and quietly crumpled images of the immemorial) and it is what makes a me : hence not a « me, » but the form (of the) « each time mine » — a pure form. If the question « who » is that of unicity or ipseity, then it must be recognized (in both senses of the term : to recognize and to acknowledge — each as difficult as the other) that the *unus ipse* is itself *received* : it is given to us and then taken away, that is all we may know with any certainty.

And all we may know, again with any certainty, is that it wouldn't make sense to want to know, or rather that it would be a misinterpretation to simply imagine any consistency or subsistence to this form that existence gives itself before us and without us, and that we call « us ».

The only admissible question that remains is that of the actual « who » — what the French call « the bourgeoisie » and what Hume calls « the middle rank of men ».

In what sense is the who a « subject »? On the one hand, he is caught in the system of justificative illusions constituted by the *logic of the proper* : he represents himself (to himself) as the origin, the motor, and the end of knowledge, of power and possession. He wishes *himself to be* in the moral law, he gives *himself* political law, he posits *himself at* the foundation of scientific idealities, he sets *himself to work*, he develops *himself in* wealth, he realizes *himself in* culture. On the other hand, he is caught in the system of *effective impropriety* : his morality is not his own but rather the majesty of a moral law that is only his when it increases either his debt or his fault (his moral *unworthiness*). Politics escapes him as political *game*, political *class*, *politicking* politics, that is to say, whenever it is actual politics — about which he only knows two things (and both things *at the same time*, although they contradict each other) : that « everything is political » and that « one must not politicize » (such or such question, such or such field, and finally any question and any field). Similarly, work escapes him at both ends : either because, as the mere execution of one or another task, it is not a work in which the subject can recognize himself, or because, as the means to wealth, it is not a work but an entire series of substitutes : lack of pleasure, risk, « overall responsibility, » control. However, culture does not any less elude the bourgeois, since arts, sciences, and literature have become practices reserved for various categories of specialized sorcerers, practices for which the middle rank of men nourishes at the same time feelings of the reverential fear due to the sacred and the contempt that is deserved, according to its innermost conviction, by any activity that leaves the ground of « realities ».

The actual subject would thus be in real trouble if it were not for one exception : *political economy*. It, and it alone, bridges the science/reality gap, for it is precisely the science of what the modern bourgeois subject conceives as *the* reality : production as the production of wealth. As far as political economy depends on « abstract considerations » (such as value, price, etc.), as globally as it conceives its object (in terms of the interdependencies of macroeconomy), or, at the other extreme, as carefully as it conducts its microanalysis, and no matter what quantificational form its method takes (statistics, econometry), Political Economy always has its origin, its end and its center in the *Firm* [*l'Entreprise*]. And *there*, the middle rank of men is not « less » but is as much or more than the scientist. He is the one who practices that which the latter endlessly approaches. In the *Firm* — which thus rightly deserves a capital letter — lies banality and *its* mystery. There knowledge itself yields to the contractor's will.

But the Firm does much more still : it is (apparently) overcoming the opposition between work and property by the creation of *valorized* (and valorizing) *occupations*, whose particularized competence is a still unanalyzed historical novelty, as well as by the transmutation of property into *management*, the specific form of a master's work that

exceeds Hegelian oppositions. Both born within the Firm, the valorized occupation and management are two different—but nevertheless complementary and even interpenetrable — modes of material technicity, which the firm extends and progressively (recently at a galloping speed) applies « outside », that is, in all the social activities that are not immediately productive and in the political sphere itself. In the process, the Firm incorporates into itself all the effective means of an ultimately « serious » morality, for it has discovered the art of containing within the limits of production the « realization » of the individual, the « security » of the socius, and the « responsibility » of the State. It dominates the progress of sciences by its seizure of research and of the University, it reforms the school apparatus in order to adapt it to the tool of production, it transforms intellectual life into cultural industry, it reduces the young to a clientele through the sponsorship of sports and the organization of a set of products and of specific « services », and, finally, it homogenizes the expression of any liberty and the formulation of any question within *its* sterilized pluralism : newspapers, radios, TVS, and even books. In an amazing dialectical sublation centered on the Firm, a finite world is thus perpetuated. *There* is the true actual subject : in this « form » under which Capital has managed to hire mankind.

We have thus also reached the point from which the question « who » and the question of the « after » can be posed. First and foremost, one must describe (as richly u possible) the « phenomenon » — whose most important and essential feature, because the newest and least questioned, is to be based on what we have called « material technicity ». Like all *technè*, it is a certain knowledge : a *knowledge of how to find one's bearings*. It thus consists in discovering forms, in outlining the dependency of these forms among themselves, and in drawing from there a protocol for their use.

It is enough to do housework [*le ménage*] in place of the housekeeper [*la femme de ménage*] in order to realize that this can only be done in a certain way, that is, in a certain order that stems from certain principles. It is thus a matter of a technique because it is a matter of a *series* of actions based on *knowledge*. However, the knowledge here does not go any further or any higher than mere « know-how » — because the considered principles are themselves strictly limited, or, more precisely, are *dead-end* principles. The questioning about the forms (which may indeed occur in order to improve the technique being used) is actually in no way a free questioning : it is not opened by the resolution to question alone, by the desire « to reveal » alone. It is only opened to a certain extent, to the extent that it also ends (or to the extent on which it closes itself), which is *evidence of a reality*. To do housework [*faire le ménage*] indeed assumes opening the window before sweeping, sweeping before mopping, sorting out the laundry, the clothes, and all kinds of objects before cleaning them or putting them away, etc. But all of this is organized within the evidence that belongs to the master-words : « to clean, » « putzen, » « mettre de l'ordre ». What, on the contrary, never comes into question is the housework [*le ménage*] itself : it is *done*, but not *questioned*.

The sign of the dead-end character of such a *technè* (which is what we mean when we call it « material ») is that (as always) such a *technè* remains deaf to its own word. *What* must be « taken care of [*ménager*] in housework [*le ménage*]? *What* then, in the housework [*le*

ménage], is being treated with consideration [*mé-nagement*] (that is, with the caution and the care due to something both essential and fragile)? What possibility for existence does housework [*le ménage*] provide [*ménage*]? For an *existentielle* must indeed be at stake for the man and the woman, in the conjugation of their « tun und treiben, » to be named by this word in particular : a « household » [*un ménage*] and for the French to say, with no need for any explanation : « a young household » [*un jeune ménage*], « their household [*leur ménage*] has its problems, » etc.

What is at stake here is nothing less than what antiquity called *oikonomia*, in a sense of the word that was preserved until Rousseau. *Oikonomia* is the law of the sojourn, which indeed *also* includes the rule of acquisition and spending but can by no means be reduced to « economic » categories. Like the « garden » for the Persians, the house is rather a kind of model of the world. Neither order, nor cleanliness, nor furniture (nor the absence of furniture in the Japanese case), nor the layout of the rooms, their allocation to such and such a function, the way to go from one to the other, nor even the relationship of the inside to the outside (of the « house » to « nature ») are the same everywhere. All of this varies in its idea, and thus in the material systems and arrangements, according to the variety of worldly-configurations at stake for each civilization, and, within each of them, according to the provincial, familial, and individual variations that make up so many singular developments of the common theme — which enrich it, reveal it to itself in specific forms, make it evolve, shift it, and sometimes shatter it upon one or another of its limits.

The name of the housekeeper [*la femme de ménage*], as the woman who takes care of [*qui ménage*] a figure of the world in the *oikos*, was first « Estia » (related to the Latin « Vesta ») — a name in which the verb « to be » [*être*] can be heard directly. When *technè* is thus understood in architectonic terms (less in terms of a construction « by principles » than in terms of a construction that is the work and the manifestation of the « archai » themselves), it never closes itself on the evidence of a real : it instead always opens itself to the furtive appearance of a world-of-being. As an Appearance, it immediately disappears, but it is commemorated by an entire disposition of forms with neither beginning nor end. Thinking (« to take care of » [*manager*] something is an exercise of thought) is, as technicity that thus moves on from form to form, *a formal* technicity. It breathes and circulates freely in itself, retracing the goddess's footsteps (methodus *investigandae* veritatis). It is a dance of logic — and, for the community as well as for each person within the community, it is immediately a ritual.

This was an example — meant to set the stage for a counterexample, that of the dead-end technique, under its two aspects of the promotion of « modern occupations » and of the universalization of « management ».

A modern occupation is a set of activities organizing a particularized aspect of production, which appears when the development of production, at the crossroad of technological possibilities and the rate of the turnover of capital, suddenly makes it feel necessary. It may happen that this modern occupation is grafted onto older occupations (those that have their limit in themselves and thus constituted « practices » before belonging to production, or were not even a part of it at all), but it is then to transform them in their essence and in all their effective modalities under the thin semblance of a social and historical

continuity that is now no more than a misleading image. Such is the case, which has become canonical since Heidegger used it as an example, with the transformation of the farmers' « hegen und pflegen » (which made of peasantry a « state of life » — *Lebenstand*) into a new occupation, in which what is organized is only a particularized aspect of the food and farming industry, that of the « small farmer ». Such is perhaps also already the case, although much more hidden (or rather : *kept* hidden for obvious reasons), of entire sections of the ancient occupations of writers, artists, and even scientists and philosophers. What part of such practices, whose greatness lay in the fact that they had in themselves the principle of their movement, being so to speak directly and constantly exposed to their foundations and changed by them, what part survives only in appearance, when each of these practices has actually become an entirely new occupation, a particularized aspect of cultural industry, from which it receives not only (which is more and more the case) its means of subsistence and success, but also the at least implicit definition of the limits of its liberty and of the outline of its task? It is very likely that this « part » may have for a long time already been the largest part, in any case the dominant part. And that the ancient free and proud subjects of the letter, the line, the touch, the hypothesis, and the symbol, the subjects that *fell prey* to their art, may almost all be transmuted, beneath the apparent continuity of the products (don't we still have « paintings, » « books, » « research, » « debates, » and more and more of them?), and thanks to the consolations provided by an easier « social recognition, » into professionals of cultural organization, of ideologico-moral sound effects, of the progress of a science based on results, and, brocaded upon the rest, of the eternal supplement of the soul. Such jobs make of these subjects, in spite of their mischiefs, which are tolerated, and in spite of the money they are given for jam or the rattles that are distributed to them, the very humble and very obedient subjects of production for the sake of production.

But the true modern subject, he who develops in all his newness¹, is the one who brings to the level of competence, that is, to the level of a knowledge that is no more than a *skill*, a set of tasks drawn « somewhere » along the way from one or several productions, tasks that can never be torn from their merely executory (or in any case subordinated) character ; similarly, no essential unity presides over the grouping of these tasks, which is entirely due to the conveniences of making and selling. All this gives birth to a race of *trained servants*, who take their servitude for the liberty and dignity conferred on them by their « qualifications » (this is at least what they are told) and who are, of course, unaware of the principally formless character of their « formation ».

However, the same goes for these new generations of occupations as for the generations of products and of ways to produce in view of which they have been instituted : they are essentially ephemeral, either because what is produced has shifted and the job suddenly dries out in a « branch » as suddenly as a well whose phreatic water has run off, or because new *ways* to produce (what learned barbarism calls new technologies] have made obsolete all the

¹ Newness is itself emphasized by the neologisms that signal their fields, parts of words manufactured in a very peculiar way : either with a « tic » ending (as [Engl.] « robotic », [French] « bureautique », etc.) that imitates (apart from one barbarism — the adding of a « t ») the *ikè* ending of Greek adjectives (*phusikè*, *logikè*) qualifying a *technè* ; or through the importation of the felicities of the American language : soft-ware, marketing, etc.

savoir-faire up to now constitutive of a given « formation ». So that the employment must learn something more than what it had learned with so much hope : it must learn to be flexible (mobile, re-classifiable, de-classifiable, etc.), that is, to submit, and it must learn to learn again (to enter into the cycle of re-cycling and retraining by means of new « formations »). In this process, dignity, more and more diminished, and liberty, more and more illusory, generate behaviors that all — except for absolute servility — meet with an internal contradiction, but that can only take on the unbearable features of an external obstacle. Hence those whom the communist party alone still calls « workers, » but who, trained and qualified, have become the *new workers* and form a sort of infrabourgeoisie of synthesis, an *establishment* of survival², hang on to « save the firm » abandoned by the development of capital, or to perpetuate the « acquired benefits » that no surplus-value permits the payment of any more, as if labor had, for a while, stopped being the mere expenditure of the labor force that finds the conditions of its use in the dead labor it faces. This internal contradiction is then denied, in an entirely non-Marxian manner, by the populist statement : « the bosses can pay ». And indeed *Capital* is not short of capital, but what this capital can pay (that is, the labor force that it can buy for itself *because* its use guarantee the return-to-itself of an increased Capital) has shifted or has taken different forms.

Sometimes (especially nowadays, in France, where socialist pedagogy has put into people's heads the idea that the Firm was the buffer of all reality and the limit of all possibility), the awareness of the internal character of this contradiction becomes widespread (or at least the pragmatic form of such awareness does : the resignation to a phenomenon that is not understood, but about which one has nevertheless understood that it could not be shifted *in this way*). Unfortunately, this only happens in order to try to shift it in several other ways, which are only apparently other and therefore stumble against the same contradiction. One of these ways consists in exorcising it (in exteriorizing it once again as pure « obstacle »), appealing to the evidence of the *national* frame of production : « Let's produce French » was and still is its slogan, as if the nation had not been for ages the mere pseudo-political dressing of a productive body that is only some part or other of world production. In order to change something, the political should be steeled in its *rupture* from the world market : nobody today dares suggest even the shadow of such an idea. It is only clear that the theologians of the Communist Party keep nurturing such a hope « among the initiated, » without, however, understanding that it is incompatible with its pseudo-realist disguise in « economic » and « social » terms. Either class collaboration gets the upper hand, or lies hit everyone over the head. So that communist Secretaries are dragging out at the Cabinet while for a long time already the Cabinet has demonstrated its decision to « break with the rupture » (besides, this was foreseeable from the start), or so that one sabotages the French car industry at the very moment when one stands up for a chauvinism of production. The only consistency that the Communist Party line still has (and one is mistaken in thinking that this line « zigzags along » as if it had no directions, when it actually *oscillates* with the regularity of an electrocardiogram around the straight contradiction that gives it its pulse) is that of the

² There is survival when one wastes one's life to make a living, however « decent » this living may be.

« moral point of view, » which it shares with Catholics, *or* that of the « radical populism » that it shares with the voters for Le Pen, *or* a mixture of both. A sad ending.

In its pure wavering, this line nevertheless testifies to more courage than all the attitudes that are the products of the « social treatment of unemployment » and of the « division of labor ». The Communists at least present the image of a community that obstinately keeps watch over the corpse of an Idea, whose death they do not know they have caused themselves by dint of making it at the same time serve *outside* the real and *inside* the real. With Marx, on the contrary, the analysis of forms was a conceptual analysis that, if it indeed brings out the a priori form of the real with which it is concerned, only does so precisely because it comes neither from a sky of ideas nor from a reflection of contents. In other words, the bite of Marx's thought (I mean that by which it actually bites at realities) lies entirely in the philosophical character of his method, inasmuch as this philosophical character itself finds its rule in a reliable logical instinct. It is thus still from Marx's thinking — provided that this instinct is elevated as much as possible to the level of a certain knowledge, to a certain degree of elucidation (one never without remainder) of what makes it *reliable*, hence with the help of works (« travaux³ ») undertaken on textual bodies other (but neither « totally other » nor « simply other ») than the Marxian corpus, some older (such as, at least, Kant) and others more recent (such as, prominently, Heidegger and Wittgenstein), hence also with a critique of the translations, in Marx himself, of this logical instinct into a mere reversal of metaphysical knowledge — it is thus still from this thinking that the understanding of a future for history itself may come, an understanding other than the indefinitely rehashed management of the un-historical as such.

One should not think too quickly that an ultimate version of the « if philosophers are kings, or kings philosophers... » is peeping through here. For we are not saying that the future itself, but only the *understanding* of the future, will depend (in the future) on the future that philosophy (if it does not renounce itself) will be able to give itself from the conjunction of the thoughts that we have just mentioned. The actual subjects « who come » (if any are coming) will, of course, be peoples, such as they emerge from the efforts of humanity (if it consents to such efforts) to exist otherwise than mankind now exists, i.e., otherwise than as a people of production (understood as a people that Production *has given to itself*). It remains to say that these efforts comprehend themselves, and up to what point and in what way they do so is also part of the form they will give themselves, and this also decides of their fortune.

Translated by Eduardo Cadava and Anne Tomiche

³ I say « travaux, » leaving « travaux » to the academics, in the same way that painters say « ciels » [skies], leaving « cieux » [heavens] to Christian preachers.