

The (Lacanian) unconscious: structure and negative ontology

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By Sadeq Rahimi

As I [pointed out in the last post](#), Lacan's successful juxtaposition of a psychoanalytic model of the subject with (post)structuralist approaches to meaning and linguistic organization has contributed immensely to the contemporary understanding of the subjective as political. At the same time, however, a significant aspect of Lacan's 'structural' conception of the subject which has fundamental relevance to our discussion is that it is constructed around a notion of negativity (or to put it in terms more familiar to Lacanians, of *lack*), and thus offers a privileged place to 'fantasy'.

Given the exceptionally rich and confounding nature of Lacan's body of work, there are a host of possible directions for approaching the question of political subjectivity in a discussion like ours, and let me be quick to confess that I have no specific one in mind as I start to write. I can, however, be specific enough to say that these two features of his approach, i.e. a (post)structuralist linguistic turn, and a (Hegelian/Kojevian) incorporation of negativity at the center of subjective being, will be the basic points of reference for my discussions, as non-linearly as it may all unfold.



Ernesto Laclau

Artwork by [Bob Row](#)

While a fundamental implication of the Lacanian model of the unconscious for our discussion is his irreversible introduction of *structure* into the working models of human psychology, it is also as fundamentally important to always perceive his 'structuralism' in the light of his unique ontology of the negative (if one may take the liberty of using such a

combination), by which I am referring to the fact that at the center, both of the Lacanian subject and of his linguistic structure one does not encounter the good old *logos*, but rather an absence, a 'lack' that bears the function of holding together the fantastic structure of reality.

I remember someone once asked me to articulate my stance on what she called "the phallogentrism of Lacanian psychoanalysis," to which I responded that as a matter of fact I believe if Lacan has done one great service to psychoanalysis, it is that he has removed the phallus from the center and has replaced it with a big hole. While Lacan may not be a typical post-structuralist given that he does not break the edifice of 'structure' into a center-free set of ebbs and flows, one can certainly not consider him a 'structuralist', given that at the center of his structure lies not the *logos*, but a big nothingness. This notion has indeed given some (typically of a militant postmodernist predisposition, I might add) a reason to criticize Lacan for failing to do away with the notion of 'center' altogether. I assume we will have to come back to this in the future.

So in the coming discussions then I will be trying to gradually work my way through these two lines of Lacanian theory, i.e. linguistic structuration and a negative ontology (and thence the primacy of fantasy), towards a picture of the subject that, as I suggested earlier, emerges as inevitably political.

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