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A LOVER'S DISCOURSE

The necessity for this book is to be found in the following consideration: that the lover's discourse is today *of an extreme solitude*. This discourse is spoken, perhaps, by thousands of subjects (who knows?), but warranted by no one; it is completely forsaken by the surrounding languages: ignored, disparaged, or derided by them, severed not only from authority but also from the mechanisms of authority (sciences, techniques, arts). Once a discourse is thus driven by its own momentum into the backwater of the "unreal," exiled from all gregariness, it has no recourse but to become the site, however exiguous, of an *affirmation*. That affirmation is, in short, the subject of the book which begins here . . .

How this book is constructed

Everything follows from this principle: that the lover is not to be reduced to a simple symptomatic subject, but rather that we hear in his voice what is "unreal," i.e., intractable. Whence the choice of a "dramatic" method which renounces examples and rests on the single action of a primary language (no metalanguage). The description of the lover's discourse has been replaced by its simulation, and to that discourse has been restored its fundamental person, the *I*, in order to stage an utterance, not an analysis. What is proposed, then, is a portrait—but not a psychological portrait; instead, a structural one which offers the reader a discursive site: the site of someone speaking within himself, *amorously*, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak.

1 Figures

- Dis-cursus—originally the action of running here and there, comings and goings, measures taken, "plots and plans": the lover, in fact, cannot keep his mind from racing, taking new measures and plotting against himself. His discourse exists only in outbursts of language, which occur at the whim of trivial, of aleatory circumstances.

These fragments of discourse can be called *figures*. The word is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its gymnastic or choreographic acceptance; in

short, in the Greek meaning: *σχῆμα* is not the "schema," but, in a much livelier way, the body's gesture caught in action and not contemplated in repose: the body of athletes, orators, statues: what in the straining body can be immobilized. So it is with the lover at grips with his figures: he struggles in a kind of lunatic sport, he spends himself, like an athlete; he "phrases," like an orator; he is caught, stuffed into a role, like a statue. The figure is the lover at work.

Figures take shape insofar as we can recognize, in passing discourse, something that has been read, heard, felt. The figure is outlined (like a sign) and memorable (like an image or a tale). A figure is established if at least someone can say: "*That's so true! I recognize that scene of language.*" For certain operations of their art, linguists make use of a vague entity which they call linguistic feeling; in order to constitute figures, we require neither more nor less than this guide: amorous feeling.

Ultimately it is unimportant whether the text's dispersion is rich here and poor there; there are nodes, blanks, many figures break off short; some, being hypostases of the whole of the lover's discourse, have just the rarity—the poverty—of essences: What is to be said of Languor, of the Image, of the Love Letter, since it is the whole of the lover's discourse which is woven of languorous desire, of the image-repertoire, of declarations? But he who utters this discourse and shapes its episodes does not know that a book is to be made of them; he does not yet know that as a good cultural subject he should neither repeat nor contradict himself, nor take the whole for the part; all he knows is that what passes through his mind at a certain moment is *marked*, like the printout of a code (in other times, this would have been the code of courtly love, or the *Carte du Tendre*).

Each of us can fill in this code according to his own history; rich or poor, the figure must be there, the site (the compartment) must be reserved for it. It is as if there were an amorous Topic, whose figure was a site (*topos*). Now the property of a Topic is to be somewhat empty: a Topic is statutorily half coded, half projective (or projective because coded). What we have been able to say below about waiting, anxiety, memory is no more than a modest supplement offered to the reader to be made free with, to be added to, subtracted from, and passed on to others: around the figure, the players pass the handkerchief which sometimes, by a final parenthesis, is held a second longer before handing it on. (Ideally, the book would be a cooperative: "To the United Readers and Lovers.")

What reads as the heading of each figure is not its definition but its argument. *Argumentum*: "exposition, account, summary, plot outline, invented narrative"; I should add: instrument of distancing, signboard à la Brecht. This argument does not refer to the amorous subject and what he is (no one external to this subject, no discourse on love), but to what he says. If there is such a figure as "Anxiety," it is because the subject sometimes exclaims (without any concern for the clinical sense of the word): "I am having an anxiety attack!" Anxiety, Anguish . . . "*Angoscia!*" Callas sings somewhere. The figure is a kind of opera aria; just as this aria is identified, memorized, and manipulated through its *incipit* ("When I am laid," "*Pleurez, mes yeux,*" "*Lucevan le stelle,*" "*Piangerò la mia sorte*"), so the figure takes its departure from a turn of phrase, a kind of verse, refrain, or cantillation which articulates it in the darkness.

It is said that words alone have specific uses, not sentences; but underneath each figure lies a sentence, frequently an unknown (unconscious?) one, which has its

use in the signifying economy of the amorous subject. This matrix-sentence (here merely postulated) is not a "saturated" one, not a completed message. Its active principle is not what it says but what it articulates: by and large, it is only a "syntactical aria," a "mode of construction." For instance, if the subject awaits the loved object at a rendezvous, a sentence-aria keeps running through his head: "*All the same, it's not fair . . .*"; "*he/she could have . . .*"; "*he/she knows perfectly well . . .*": knows what? It doesn't matter, the figure "Waiting" is already formed. Such sentences are matrices of figures precisely because they remain suspended: they utter the affect, then break off, their role is filled. The words are never crazed (at most perverse), but the syntax is: is it not on the level of the sentence that the subject seeks his place—and fails to find it—or finds a false place imposed upon him by language? Underneath the figure, there is something of the "verbal hallucination" (Freud, Lacan): a mutilated sentence which is generally limited to its syntactical portion ("*Even though you are . . .*" "*If you were still . . .*"). Whence the emotion of every figure: even the mildest bears within it the terror of a *suspense*: in it, I hear the tempestuous, Neptunian *quos ego . . .*

2 Order

Throughout any love life, figures occur to the lover without any order, for on each occasion they depend on an (internal or external) accident. Confronting each of these incidents (what "befalls" him), the amorous subject draws on the reservoir (the thesaurus?) of figures, depending on the needs, the injunctions, or the pleasures of his image-repertoire. Each figure explodes, vibrates in and of itself like a sound severed from any tune—or is repeated to satiety, like the motif of a hovering music. No logic

links the figures, determines their contiguity: the figures are non-syntagmatic, non-narrative; they are Erinyes; they stir, collide, subside, return, vanish with no more order than the flight of mosquitoes. Amorous *dis-cursus* is not dialectical; it turns like a perpetual calendar, an encyclopedia of affective culture (there is something of Bouvard and Pécuchet in the lover).

In linguistic terms, one might say that the figures are distributional but not integrative; they always remain on the same level: the lover speaks in bundles of sentences but does not integrate these sentences on a higher level, into a work; his is a horizontal discourse: no transcendence, no deliverance, no novel (though a great deal of the fictive). Every amorous episode can be, of course, endowed with a meaning: it is generated, develops, and dies; it follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to a causality or a finality—even, if need be, which can be moralized ("*I was out of my mind, I'm over it now*" "*Love is a trap which must be avoided from now on*" etc.): this is the *love story*, subjugated to the great narrative Other, to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must "get over" ("It develops, grows, causes suffering, and passes away" in the fashion of some Hippocratic disease): the love story (the "episode," the "adventure") is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it.

Very different is the discourse, the soliloquy, the *aside* which accompanies this story (and this history), *without ever knowing it*. It is the very principle of this discourse (and of the text which represents it) that its figures cannot

be *classified*: organized, hierarchized, arranged with a view to an end (a settlement): there are no first figures, no last figures. To let it be understood that there was no question here of a love story (or of the history of a love), to discourage the temptation of meaning, it was necessary to choose an *absolutely insignificant* order. Hence we have subjugated the series of figures (inevitable as any series is, since the book is by its status obliged to *progress*) to a pair of arbitrary factors: that of nomination and that of the alphabet. Each of these arbitrary factors is nonetheless tempered: one by semantic necessity (among all the nouns in the dictionary, a figure can receive only two or three), the other by the age-old convention which decides the order of our alphabet. Hence we have avoided the wiles of pure chance, which might indeed have produced logical sequences; for we must not, one mathematician tells us, "underestimate the power of chance to engender monsters"; the monster, in this case, would have been, emerging from a certain order of the figures, a "philosophy of love" where we must look for no more than its affirmation.

3 References

In order to compose this amorous subject, pieces of various origin have been "put together." Some come from an ordinary reading, that of Goethe's *Werther*. Some come from insistent readings (Plato's *Symposium*, Zen, psychoanalysis, certain Mystics, Nietzsche, German lieder). Some come from occasional readings. Some come from conversations with friends. And there are some which come from my own life.

What comes from books and from friends occasionally appears in the margin of the text, in the form of names (for the books) and initials (for the friends). The refer-

ences supplied in this fashion are not authoritative but amical: I am not invoking guarantees, merely recalling, by a kind of salute given in passing, what has seduced, convinced, or what has momentarily given the delight of understanding (of being understood?). Therefore, these reminders of reading, of listening, have been left in the frequently uncertain, incompleting state suitable to a discourse whose occasion is indeed the memory of the sites (books, encounters) where such and such a thing has been read, spoken, heard. For if the author here lends his "culture" to the amorous subject, in exchange the amorous subject affords him the innocence of his image-repertoire, indifferent to the proprieties of knowledge.

*So it is a lover who speaks
and who says:*

“I am engulfed, I succumb . . .”

s'abîmer / to be engulfed

Outburst of annihilation which affects the amorous subject in despair or fulfillment.

Werther

1. Either woe or well-being, sometimes I have a craving to be engulfed. This morning (in the country), the weather is mild, overcast. I am suffering (from some incident). The notion of suicide occurs to me, pure of any resentment (not blackmailing anyone); an insipid notion; it alters nothing (“breaks” nothing), matches the color (the silence, the desolation) of this morning.

Another day, in the rain, we're waiting for the boat at the lake; from happiness, this time, the same outburst of annihilation sweeps through me. This is how it happens sometimes, misery or joy engulfs me, without any particular tumult ensuing: nor any pathos: I am dissolved, not dismembered; I fall, I flow, I melt. Such thoughts—grazed, touched, tested (the way you test the water with your foot)—can recur. Nothing solemn about them.

This is exactly what *gentleness* is.

2. The crisis of engulfment can come from a wound,

WERTHER: “In such thoughts I am engulfed, I succumb, under the power of these magnificent visions . . . I shall see her . . . Everything, yes, everything, as though engulfed by an abyss, vanishes into this prospect.”

Tristan
Baudelaire

but also from a fusion: we die together from loving each other: an open death, by dilution into the ether, a closed death of the shared grave.

Engulfment is a moment of hypnosis. A suggestion functions, which commands me to swoon without killing myself. Whence, perhaps, the gentleness of the abyss: I have no responsibility here, the act (of dying) is not up to me: I entrust myself, I transmit myself (to whom? to God, to Nature, to everything, except to the other).

Ruysbroeck

3. Therefore, on those occasions when I am engulfed, it is because there is no longer any place for me anywhere, not even in death. The image of the other—to which I was glued, on which I lived—no longer exists; sometimes this is a (futile) catastrophe which seems to remove the image forever, sometimes it is an excessive happiness which enables me to unite with the image; in any case, severed or united, dissolved or discrete, I am nowhere *gathered together*; opposite, neither you nor me, nor death, nor anything else to talk to.

(Strangely, it is in the extreme action of the amorous Image-repertoire—annihilation as a consequence of driving out the image or of being identified with it—that there occurs a fall of this Image-repertoire: for the brief interval of a vacillation, I lose my structure as a lover: this is a factitious mourning, without work to do: something like a non-site.)

4. In love with death? An exaggeration to say, with

TRISTAN: “In the blessed abyss of the infinite ether, in your sublime soul, boundless immensity, I sink and am engulfed, unconscious, O bliss!” (Isolde's death).

BAUDELAIRE: “Some pink and blue evening, we shall exchange a single impulse, a kind of long sob, heavy with farewells” (“*La Mort des amants*”).

RUYSBROECK: “. . . The repose of the abyss.”

Keats, *half in love with easeful death*: death liberated from dying. Then I have this fantasy: a gentle hemorrhage which flows from no specific point in my body, an *almost* immediate consumption, calculated so that I might have the time to abate my suffering without yet having died. Fleeting I establish myself within a false conception of death (false the way a key is "falsified" by warping): I conceive of death *beside me*: I conceive of it according to an unthought logic, I drift outside of the fatal couple which links life and death by opposing them to each other.

Sartre

5. Is the abyss no more than an expedient annihilation? It would not be difficult for me to read the abyss, not as a repose, but as an *emotion*. I mask my mourning by an evasion; I dilute myself, I swoon in order to escape that density, that clogging which makes me into a *responsible* subject: I come out: it is ecstasy.

Rue du Cherche-Midi, after a difficult evening, X was explaining very carefully, his voice exact, his sentences well-formed, far from anything inexpressible, that sometimes he longed to swoon; he regretted never being able to disappear at will.

His words were saying that he meant then to succumb to his weakness, not to resist the wounds the world inflicted upon him; but at the same time he was substituting for this failing strength another strength, another affirmation: *I assume toward and against everything a denial of courage, hence a denial of morality*: that is what X's voice was saying.

SARTRE: On swooning and anger as evasions, *The Emotions*.

The Absent One

absence / absence

Any episode of language which stages the absence of the loved object—whatever its cause and its duration—and which tends to transform this absence into an ordeal of abandonment.

Werther

1. Many *lieder*, songs, and *mélodies* about the beloved's absence. And yet this classic figure is not to be found in Werther. The reason is simple: here the loved object (Charlotte) does not move; it is the amorous subject (Werther) who, at a certain moment, departs. Now, absence can exist only as a consequence of the other: it is the other who leaves, it is I who remain. The other is in a condition of perpetual departure, of journeying; the other is, by vocation, migrant, fugitive; I—I who love, by converse vocation, am sedentary, motionless, at hand, in expectation, nailed to the spot, *in suspense*—like a package in some forgotten corner of a railway station. Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present *I* is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent *you*. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject's place and the other's place cannot permute; it is to say: "I am loved less than I love."

2. Historically, the discourse of absence is carried on by the Woman: Woman is sedentary, Man hunts, jour-

Hugo

neys; Woman is faithful (she waits), man is fickle (he sails away, he cruises). It is Woman who gives shape to absence, elaborates its fiction, for she has time to do so; she weaves and she sings; the Spinning Songs express both immobility (by the hum of the Wheel) and absence (far away, rhythms of travel, sea surges, cavalcades). It follows that in any man who utters the other's absence *something feminine* is declared: this man who waits and who suffers from his waiting is miraculously feminized. A man is not feminized because he is inverted but because he is in love. (Myth and utopia: the origins have belonged, the future will belong to the subjects *in whom there is something feminine*.)

E.B.

3. Sometimes I have no difficulty enduring absence. Then I am "normal": I fall in with the way "everyone" endures the departure of a "beloved person"; I diligently obey the training by which I was very early accustomed to be separated from my mother—which nonetheless remained, at its source, a matter of suffering (not to say hysteria). I behave as a well-weaned subject; I can feed myself, *meanwhile*, on other things besides the maternal breast.

This endured absence is nothing more or less than forgetfulness. I am, intermittently, unfaithful. This is the condition of my survival; for if I did not forget, I should die. The lover who doesn't forget *sometimes* dies of excess, exhaustion, and tension of memory (like Werther).

Werther

(As a child, I didn't forget: interminable days, abandoned days, when the Mother was working far away; I would go,

HUGO: "Woman, whom do you weep for?" "The absent one" ("L'Absent," a poem set to music by Fauré).
E.B.: Letter.

evenings, to wait for her at the U^{bis} bus stop, Sèvres-Babylone; the buses would pass one after the other, she wasn't in any of them.)

4. I waken out of this forgetfulness very quickly. In great haste, I reconstitute a memory, a confusion. A (classic) word comes from the body, which expresses the emotion of absence: *to sigh*: "to sigh for the bodily presence": the two halves of the androgyne sigh for each other, as if each breath, being incomplete, sought to mingle with the other: the image of the embrace, in that it melts the two images into a single one: in amorous absence, I am, sadly, an *unglued image* that dries, yellows, shrivels.

Ruysbroeck

Symposium

Diderot

(But isn't desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent? Isn't the object *always* absent? —This isn't the same languor: there are two words: *Pothos*, desire for the absent being, and *Himéros*, the more burning desire for the present being.)

Greek

5. Endlessly I sustain the discourse of the beloved's absence; actually a preposterous situation; the other is absent as referent, present as allocutory. This singular distortion generates a kind of insupportable present; I am wedged between two tenses, that of the reference and that of the allocution: you have gone (which I lament), you are here (since I am addressing you). Whereupon I know what the present, that difficult tense, is: a pure portion of anxiety.

DIDEROT: "Bring your lips to mine/so that out of my mouth/my soul may pass into yours" (*Chanson dans le goût de la romance*).

Absence persists—I must endure it. Hence I will *manipulate* it: transform the distortion of time into oscillation, produce rhythm, make an entrance onto the stage of language (language is born of absence: the child has made himself a doll out of a spool, throws it away and picks it up again, miming the mother's departure and return: a paradigm is created). Absence becomes an active practice, a *business* (which keeps me from doing anything else); there is a creation of a fiction which has many roles (doubts, reproaches, desires, melancholies). This staging of language postpones the other's death: a very short interval, we are told, separates the time during which the child still believes his mother to be absent and the time during which he believes her to be already dead. To manipulate absence is to extend this interval, to delay as long as possible the moment when the other might topple sharply from absence into death.

Winnicott

6. Frustration would have Presence as its figure (I see the other every day, yet I am not satisfied thereby: the object is actually there yet continues, in terms of my image-repertoire, to be absent for me). Whereas castration has Intermittence as its figure (I agree to leave the other for a while, "without tears," I assume the grief of the relation, I am able to *forget*). Absence is the figure of privation; simultaneously, I desire and I need. Desire is squashed against need: that is the obsessive phenomenon of all amorous sentiment.

Ruysbroeck

("Desire is present, ardent, eternal: but God is higher still, and the raised arms of Desire never attain to the adored plenitude." The discourse of Absence is a text with two ideograms: there are *the raised arms of Desire*, and there are *the wide-open arms of Need*. I oscillate, I vacil-

late between the phallic image of the raised arms, and the babyish image of the wide-open arms.)

7. I take a seat, alone, in a café; people come over and speak to me; I feel that I am sought after, surrounded, flattered. But the other is absent; I invoke the other inwardly to keep me on the brink of this mundane complacency, a temptation. I appeal to the other's "truth" (the truth of which the other gives me the sensation) against the hysteria of seduction into which I feel myself slipping. I make the other's absence responsible for my worldliness: *I invoke* the other's protection, the other's return: let the other appear, take me away, like a mother who comes looking for her child, from this worldly brilliance, from this social infatuation, let the other restore to me "the religious intimacy, the gravity" of the lover's world. (X once told me that love had protected him against worldliness: coteries, ambitions, advancements, interferences, alliances, secessions, roles, powers: love had made him into a social catastrophe, to his delight.)

s.s.

8. A Buddhist Koan says: "The master holds the disciple's head underwater for a long, long time; gradually the bubbles become fewer; at the last moment, the master pulls the disciple out and revives him: when you have craved truth as you crave air, then you will know what truth is."

The absence of the other holds my head underwater; gradually I drown, my air supply gives out: it is by this asphyxia that I reconstitute my "truth" and that I prepare what in love is Intractable.

s.s.: Koan reported by S.S.

The Tip of the Nose

altération / alteration

Abrupt production, within the amorous field, of a counter-image of the loved object. According to minor incidents or tenuous features, the subject suddenly sees the good Image alter and capsize.

Ruysbroeck
Dostoevsky

1. Ruysbroeck has been buried for five years; he is exhumed; his body is intact and pure (of course—otherwise, there would be no story); *but* “there was only the tip of the nose which bore a faint but certain trace of corruption.” In the other’s perfect and “embalmed” figure (for that is the degree to which it fascinates me) I perceive suddenly a speck of corruption. This speck is a tiny one: a gesture, a word, an object, a garment, something unexpected which appears (which dawns) from a region I had never even suspected, and suddenly attaches the loved object to a *commonplace* world. Could the other be vulgar, whose elegance and originality I had so religiously hymned? Here is a gesture by which is revealed a being of another race. I am *flabbergasted*: I hear a counter-rhythm: something like a syncope in the lovely phrase of the loved being, the noise of a rip in the smooth envelope of the Image.

(Like the Jesuit Kircher’s hen, released from hypnosis by a light tap, I am temporarily de-fascinated, not without pain.)

DOSTOEVSKY: The death of Father Zossima: the noxious smell of the corpse (*The Brothers Karamazov*).