Howl and the Postmodern Subjectivity

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**Abstract**

History is, in a sense, a story about us viewing ourselves. Why does the “Subject” matter? Because the Subject is our history – a story, a narrative about ourselves. For many centuries we have understood to use this concept to describe a relationship between us and the world, to ponder epistemological, metaphysical or ethical questions. But now, in postmodern times, we came to see the “Subject” as it is: a narrative, a structure of culture and language created by us to be used. Through the analysis of Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl” we open up a way to regain this insight, we open a road which shows this narrative in its narrative-ness and through this opening up a deconstruction of the history of philosophy.

**Keywords:** “Howl”, Subject, otherness, postmodernism.

In September 1955 at the Six Gallery in San Francisco, Allen Ginsberg read “Howl”, literally a howl about the birth of a new generation that brought on a new conscience of the self. Allen Ginsberg writes in “Howl” about the struggle between the rebellious spirit of the young generation pit against an overwhelming socio-political system, a final pagan deity who seems bent on destroying this spirit. In “Stories Done”, Mikal Gilmore (an editorialist at *The Rolling Stones* magazine) remarked that “Something opened up in America’s culture and in it’s future the day that Ginsberg gave utterance to these thoughts with *Howl*” (Gilmore 2008).

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This cultural mutation, foreseen by the history of the first 50 or so years of the XX-th century, marked by war and economical recession, excess, anxiety and depression outbursts in a sublime manner in Ginsberg’s words, like a Prometheus finally unchained who rushes to attack the very order which imprisoned him for insubordination. What happens then in “Howl”?

The poem is structured in three parts and an end note and is centered around experiencing the contemporary world. Today the image built by Ginsberg seems normal, a phenomenology of our day to day life and world; but at the time the poem was published it was a scandalous one, proved by the fact that Ginsberg was prosecuted for public indecency and the poem being banned by the American government. But all this was sort of expected from a poem which presents itself like a frustration howl of a whole generation, who sees itself as a release and in the same time a struggle to aggressively capture its own legitimacy. “Howl” is not a quiet poem but a loud one, with unsettling imagery, in which individuals who have reached the limits of social oppression finally get a chance to cry against the system, thus showing they prefer their individuality and artistic life energy to social conformity and the comfort of blending in... But in the same time it is a poem of self-destruction of this generation in which the theme of subjectivity is repeatedly questioned, first in regard to Moloch – the demonized society and then in regard to itself and its own mental alienation. “Howl” can be read in many ways but what we are interested in here is the image of subjectivity in this defining poem for the attitude and vision of postmodernism, for the question we ask is this – “Can we speak of a death of the Subject (and subjectivity) in postmodernism or is it a change in something else?“.

We were speaking earlier about the way in which “Howl” is a defining example of the postmodern attitude; but the poem itself is not entirely postmodern. “Howl” rather sits in a transition point, between modern and postmodern culture; although textually and stylistically it is not yet postmodern through its themes and the way it expounds them, “Howl” is the very transition from modern to postmodern (and by this I do not mean that this transition was done exclusively through this text rather that this poem, because it is not yet a definitive image of the way
a postmodern text is constituted as a dynamic of this transition, illustrating and performing it in the same time). Three I think are the themes and perspectives through which Ginsberg puts himself in this transition. Firstly there is an annulment of the between high-culture and low-culture, between cultural elitism and mass culture. It’s enough to consider these lines: “Mohammedan angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated” and “angel headed hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo” (Ginsberg 1956). Here Ginsberg combines “elevated” imaginary – the angelic or celestial – with urban imagery like a patchy rooftop, bitnick slang and pop language. Together “genitals and manuscripts” are flaunted – art and sex, literary culture and carnality are blended. The second element of this postmodernity is a fragmentation of the self: a de-centerment of subjectivity, a deconstruction of the individual as a Subject, projecting this deconstruction at the individual’s level then at society’s level and finally at metaphysical level, concerning the whole kosmos in which the poem is set. The circularity of these three levels is obvious and they collapse in each other. This circularity in which the metaphysical, the social and the individual seem to be the same thing reveals the final third element of Howl’s postmodernism. The logical conclusion of this postmodern pastiche is a specific flatness or depthlessness – what remains is a plane of surface images, like a curved film in Hinton’s “A plane world”\(^2\). These all reveal themselves to the postmodern eye as just narratives; thus they are deconstructed, one by one; and their allegorical death transforms them in meta-narratives of the other levels. The conflict between the intrinsic character of each level and the meta-narrative positioning is the source which opens up a postmodern hermeneutic horizon in which what seems like the ultimate deconstruction of subjectivity takes place.

To reach this decentering of subjectivity as it is experimented by Ginsberg here in “Howl”, I will start from this third level that I mentioned earlier. In The Postmodern Condition (La Condition postmoderne), Lyotard gives a first definition of postmodernism:

Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives. This incredulity is undoubtedly a product of progress in the sciences: but that progress in turn presupposes it. To the obsolescence of the metanarrative apparatus of legitimation corresponds, most notably, the crisis of metaphysical philosophy and of the university institution which in the past relied on it. The narrative function is losing its expression, its great hero, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goal. It is being dispersed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, descriptive, and so on. Conveyed within each cloud are pragmatic valences specific to its kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable. (Lyotard 1984, XXIV).

Going back to Ginsberg’s text the incredulity towards the grand narratives meant to legitimize the metaphysical, the social and the individual as obvious. Metaphysically – the ontological constitution of the poem’s universe is turned upside down; in the third part of the poem, a descent into the mental universe of Carl Salomon offers the metaphysical constituents of the universe in which the battle between Molloch (second part) and the contemporary generation takes part; of course we do have a paradigm here, but this being one of madness, is deconstructed even in it’s constitution and is de-centered so that the metaphysics of this universe is one of *crysis*. The whole poem thus seems to us like a giant experiencing of this postmodern universe; the experience of the universe is set on three levels – individually, socially and metaphysically; and at each level the world is experienced in the way of a *crisis* – existential, social or metaphysical. The crisis of which Lyotard spoke above, trying to define postmodernism, the crisis of grand narratives, happens here as well as Ginsberg attacks each of these, one by one. In the end the crisis of subjectivity is, as we shall see, central to this endeavor.

The universe of Carl Solomon is dominated by the systematic descent of the high elements into the concrete, mundane and even ridiculous; this metaphysical restructuring makes the whole landscape seem crazy. But put within the entirety of the vision everything seems right and liberating; the descent of the ideal and the breakup of the transcendental conscience give a very strong sensation of freedom in which the individual expression takes first stage. For example when Ginsberg says:
“where you bang on the catatonic piano the soul
is innocent and immortal it should never die
ungodly in an armed madhouse”
or “O victory forget your underwear we’re free”.

The metaphysical deconstruction of the universe is the basis of this
new found freedom, of this conquered freedom which marches forward
towards the destruction of subjectivity; and we may ask ourselves –
where does the problem of subjectivity appear here? But it is enough to
analyze the structure of the text to see it – every odd verse is the same in
this third part of the poem: “I am with you in Rockland.” (Ginsberg 1956).

The obsessive repetition of this “I am with you” transforms the
subjectivity and the otherness in a discursive structure showing that
they are just linguistic devices, belonging to the narratology of the text.
In the metaphysics in which we are thrown subjectivity and otherness
are not; they appear only on the sidelines, as narrative structures; in this
universe we can find only an expression of the vital artistic feeling of
individuals. So here, at a first level, subjectivity is dispensed as just a
narrative device and what seemed like a fundamental constituent of any
ontology becomes a simple linguistic tool; this is because we are no
longer interested in metaphysics/ontology, now they appear to us rather
as just narratives thrown abusively upon us, in which we seem to be
forced to believe.

On the contrary, taking aside metaphysics, only the direct
experience of the world remains; completely immersed in this
enveloping experience we are, of course, mad like Solomon, but
completely free, denouncing the narratives imposed upon us by exterior
forces. It is enough to compare this paradigm to different metaphysics
and ontologies of modern philosophical tradition – Descartes, Kant or
even Husserl to see that the very thing which was the central point –
subjectivity – was disclosed as just another narrative, a linguistic tool, a
sideline structure or, in most case, an absent one, whose removal frees
the respective world of its own tyranny (on a side note here we can see
the stem for the postmodern death of the author in literary theory – an
idea which reverberated further into the field of semiotics with concepts
like *opera aperta* (Eco 1962) or *struttura assente* (Eco 1980). Metaphysics
thus becomes simply a narration about the world; like any narration it is essentially an open work and thus subjectivity is, in this context (and context is the fundamental word here!) an absent structure.

Next, let’s move towards the second part of the poem, dedicated to the crysis which bears the face of Molloch, the pagan deity to which the Canaanite people sacrificed their children. Molloch is for Ginsberg the face of society and thus a narrative of evil. By effectively emptying the content of the opposition between the individual and the society symbolized by Molloch, we come in this point to a paradox – we come to a central dilemma of postmodernism. If we accept the cultural and political implication through which “Howl” is a defining work of art of post-war culture – an affirmation of individual, cultural and sexual liberty – then we effectively accept that Ginsberg tore down the institutions; he tore down social institutions, government bureaucracy and the great narrative that Molloch symbolizes. But by tearing down Molloch, he actually brought down the concept itself of a great narrative – including his own narrative. For the concept of great narratives is in itself a great narrative. Thus, if postmodernism brings on the end of great narratives, then it must not be one. So every event which happens in this cultural horizon – for example the event of the reading of “Howl” in 1955, or the story of how what was initially a sub-culture succeeded in changing the cultural landscape in just evening – all these suffer the same fate.

There is an inherent paradox here – a great narrative to end and at the same time remove all great narratives, including himself. The structure of this reflexivity affects the view that subjectivity is just another great narrative, in the context of a crysis between the individual and society. The deconstruction of subjectivity as a narrative of society meant to make individuals conform to norms we are meant to enter inside this narrative; if subjectivity is artificially imposed on the individual, its deconstruction is artificially imposed upon it from its outside; so even the tragedy of this battle between individuals and Molloch, a crisis of subjectivity reflected in society, is just a narration which, ultimately, does not authentically belong to the individuals but is a legitimacy of another subjectivity constructed negatively in relation to a historico-social context which used to legitimize an order now obsolete. Leaving behind the old order is a new order; that is why the
deconstruction of subjectivity in the postmodern horizon transforms this very horizon in an existential condition. In the world in which Molloch is finally tore down like any other narrative we are left with only two options – a nihilistic approach in which these narratives are completely deconstructed and removed and, in their complete absence the individual remains in a definitive suspended state of disbelief; the other option is that of a generalized euphoria, a kind of utopia, in which these narratives do not cease to be but simply they don’t have any authority any more, thus a general state of relativism is instated and the individuals, freed from the authority of such narratives, become cultural products of this new condition.

Between these two options it is clear that we cannot find an objective criterion to choose one of them and the universe swings back and forth between nihilism and the euphoria of relativity. And we shall see later, at the individual’s level, how this constant swing is seen. But for now let us remark that in this second part, by deconstructing the narrative of society which wants to conform individuals to its rules, the narrative of the Subject is itself removed; the Subject is here a necessary construct for the social paradigm because the authoritarian society sees individuals as subjects, thus setting norms which transcend pure individuality. The transcendence of pure individuality becomes the constitutive moment in this politico-social landscape; accordingly the Subject is deconstructed at a social level and the de-centering of the self is made towards the individual which, once being freed, is not preoccupied any more with thinking himself, but rather with experiencing. And this is what the first part is about, in which the Subject is completely deconstructed at this final level of the individual.

In the first part of “Howl”, Ginsberg speaks of those whom he calls “the best minds of my generation” – outcasts, freaks, sexually different, artists, but most important free people. In a continuous struggle with Molloch against conformity, against abuse and captivity they live by expressing themselves not fulfilling a role. The poem starts with the pronoun “I” which soon dissolves into the relative-interrogative “who”. This dissolution is in fact a de-centering of the Self caused by the crisis of the Subject in the postmodern cultural paradigm. It is plain to see that the general state of things throughout the poem is one of *crisis*, but
nowhere is it so acute as here, where the self of the individuals is lost and dispersed in the others; this communion with others actually removes the Subject’s independence which predicates himself based on difference; the others in which he looses himself are others exactly on the basis of them being different from the Subject; the de-centering of the Subject in the others means its dissemination in this difference which seems to precede him. This is what we are after here – the deconstruction of the Subject as a final grand narrative, a linguistic structure which, once removed, gives way to the experience of individuals. And we can see the way in which this deconstruction is reflected on the individual’s level by following Ginsberg’s text and looking at the way in which these people live their lives, experiencing their own world. Every descriptive line is not just in the possession of the Subject; everything takes up a general rather than individual space. Thus, a lot of the specific referrals to Ginsberg’s contemporaries, be them to Kerouac (“who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity”) or to Huncke (“who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank docks waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steam-heat and opium”), communicate an universal experience. Ginsberg avoids nothing and experiences to the hilt. But in the postmodern space these experiences are not only his with the de-centering of the Subject. After just a couple of the poem’s lines, the self is completely consumed by the descriptive “other”: there is no more an anchored “I”, a centered Subject. There is no Ginsberg anymore, but fragments of his experiences as they came to him, line after line. He gives himself to these experiences – he dislodges his “I” and this is thus dispersed.

Ginsberg’s perspective here is thus paradigmatic for the entire postmodern ideology for the deconstruction of the Subject and subjectivity. The philosophical source of this deconstruction is of course the deconstruction of objectivity. The poetical source to which Ginsberg converges is the individual experience. The problem of the deconstruction of objectivity appears in postmodernism when we adopt a critical attitude towards the notion of truth. This critical attitude calls forth and brings into judgment the very constitution of truth. And, as we noticed earlier, even from Lyotard’s text, truth and with it objectivity
become in the postmodern hermeneutic horizon just grand narratives, which don’t find any justification anymore or any authority. For example Lyotard says: “Thus justice is consigned to the grand narrative in the same way as truth.” (Lyotard 1984, XXIV). By making truth be just another meta-narrative the whole theoretical construction which surrounds it is put into the same hermeneutic horizon – of interpreting it just as a narrative. But it is exactly in this theoretical construction surrounding truth that the idea of objectivity reveals itself. And the deconstruction of objectivity reveals the subjectivity in relation to which the objectivity constitutes itself as such.

The question that we must ask now is this: is objectivity possible? If we interpret this first part of the poem as a reflection upon the contemporary condition of human being, then – as it is presented here by Ginsberg – this human being is in the postmodern condition described by Lyotard. In this condition objectivity cannot be possible anymore for it assumes an epistemological model which cannot be sustained in the world as it is described here. The premises of objectivity reside in the possibility of Truth, conceived outside of a Subject; the epistemological model of objectivity presupposes a cognitive realism based on representation – the reproduction for a subject of an objective reality which exists outside of him. This means that the premise for the possibility of objectivity resides in the relationship between the Subject and the world, and even more precisely in a metaphysics of a world existing independently of a subject. But this metaphysics of subjectivity inevitably takes us to the problem of the possibility of the outside world. But the possibility of the outside world already articulates, on the basis of this “outside”, a privileged spot for the subject in relation to a foreign reality which is already given to him.

This privileged spot for the Subject can be seen in the history of western metaphysics and is substantiated in an increasingly acute manner beginning with Descartes and the paradigm he opens up. Starting with Descartes truth shifts its location from the world to the subject, from that which is given as being exterior to that which is at hand, and what is more at hand that our own subjectivity and our own Beingness. We thus become our own objects but with a privileged status – we are at-hand for ourselves in a way that all other objects which make
up our exteriority are not and nor will they ever be (a conclusion fully explored in the metaphysical negativity of Kant, expressed in the ultimate incognoscibility of the *noumena*). Furthermore the accessibility of our exteriority lies in the accessibility of our own subjectivity, but we can appropriate it fully only in a dark and weird separation of self, in which by separating from ourselves we can make ourselves be our own objects, we transform ourselves into the object in relation to which we are a subject. Descartes concludes that only after rooting ourselves into a secure certainty we can direct ourselves towards the outside world and appropriate it; thus we shall have a positive knowledge of the world, the soul, of the ultimate nature of reality and the essence of things. The purpose for this new subject and this new subjectivity rooted in the certainty of our self-knowledge is to create a ground on which the representation of all things as objects of knowledge can be built. The active presupposition here is that if we have at-hand a strong enough fundamental engagement all the objects of experience have the potential to be known; the subject itself is present in the relationship between the mind and the world, giving a sole direction, from knower towards that which is to be known; this model claims that it does not add anything to the essence of objects, their knowledge being imprinted in the Subject. Going further along this metaphysics we will eventually reach Hegel’s *Aufhebung* in which, like in a final conclusion of the paradigm, a certain definitive unity between the Subject and the world, between the concept and the conscience is reached.

Truth is here the presence or presentation of essence as *Gewesenheit*, of *wesen* as *having-been*. Consciousness is the truth of man to the extent that man appears to himself in consciousness in his being-past, in his to-have-been, in his past surpassed and conserved, retained, interiorized and relevé [the French translation of *aufheben*]. (Derrida 1997, 120-1)

*Relevé* would thus be the Hegelian meeting between the thesis and the antithesis, that elation that can stretch towards any direction. And this is exactly the starting point for the postmodern condition – of the man who cannot find himself in himself, the man who does not step out of his self together with his self to appropriate an exterior reality, transforming thus the exteriority of the world into the interiority of his
own subjectivity. Reading the first part of “Howl”, it is obvious that objectivity has become impossible for that “I” with which the poem begins that ends up disseminated into the others. In a group of individuals in which everybody keeps its own individuality, objectivity becomes pointless because the world is not seen as an exteriority that needs to be exhausted. The world comes into being in the complete experimentation of the Beingness of individuals, in life experience such as truth is moved from representation to a performative model. What does this mean for the problem of subjectivity? If objectivity cannot be constituted then how can we constitute objectivity? Here I think an idea expressed by Derrida in *Speech and Phenomena* is very important:

This determination of absolute subjectivity would also have to be crossed out as soon as we conceive the present on the basis of difference, not the reverse. The concept of subjectivity belongs apriori and in general to the order of the constituted [...] There is no constituting subjectivity. The very concept of constitution itself must be deconstructed. (Derrida 1973, 84-85)

Thus the essential way of being of the subject, that which seemed to traditional metaphysics as being the essence of subjectivity – the constituting character – is eliminated in the postmodern condition. The reason upon which this is possible? The preceding character of *difference*. Searching for a definition for *difference* Derrida remarks: “if there were a definition of *différance*, it would be precisely the limit, the interruption of the Hegelian relève wherever it operates” (Derrida 1973, 40). What does all this mean? That difference precedes the subject and not the other way around. The preceding character of difference in relation to the subject is that which nullifies the it’s constituting character; and through the deconstruction of the metaphysics which put the subject in a central spot is accomplished for how would there still be possible a metaphysics of subjectivity in which the world is understood from the point of view of a persisting consciousness (as we could interpret *ousia* or *hypoikeimenon*) if this continuous presence is no longer given such as we could build from it the presence of the world and objects in it? The difference, it would seem, nullifies the primordiality of the subject; in another passage Derrida again remarks, questions the Subject:
What differs? Who differs? What is différance? (...) If we accepted this form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax (“What is?”, “Who is?”, “What is that?”), we would have to conclude that différance has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being as a Subject a who. (Derrida 1991, 65)

This shows that in Derrida’s vision difference, being constitutive for the Subject, makes it lose not only its ontological privileged position but also his internal unity. So it must be deconstructed; and the deconstruction of the Subject brings out the historical character of the idea that we now have about it and it shows that subjectivity is not a given of our existence but a narrative constructed through overlapping layers built by a tradition of metaphysics centered around a “who”, a subject. The de-centering of the Subject is the attitude that we can find in “Howl” because now, the author’s conscience, gone out of itself is positioned in the space of intersubjectivity. But not only the author’s own subjectivity is disseminated – the subjectivity of those designated by “the greatest minds of our generation” is disseminated as well; what is then left behind? We are left with inter-subjectivity, a space between all these individuals in which the author positions himself; and because this space does not belong to any subjectivity in particular the very authorship of the author is lost in dissemination, letting inter-subjectivity to be manifest and inviting the reader to position himself in this space in which the classical conditions of author and reader dissipate; in return we are presented with individuals who experiment a world which does not come to them as a given from the outside, but which reveals itself in its very experimentation.

Let’s now look behind at the way in which subjectivity appeared to us in the context of postmodern condition. First it appeared as a product of cultural-historical tradition. This tradition, based on a metaphysics of presence, puts subjectivity in a central spot, giving it a constitutive character in regard to the world. The world is a given, exterior, and it’s essence is created through the relation which the subject has with it. The subject exercises its constituting powers first regarding himself, then regarding the world, giving everything an essence (giving substance), a nature. And in all this the subject is not considered at an individual level, but beyond this, at a transcendental one, taking himself as its
object. This tradition ends up in a crisis of representation in which individuals lose their identity in an ultimate union with a world whose Beingness they have just built. The postmodern crisis of the subject is the crisis of this state. This state in which the individual cannot understate himself any longer as a subject from the perspective of the whole history this word implies. So the construct is compromised. What Ginsberg’s poem ultimately shows is such a state in which the individual realizes the construction in front of which he stands, a historical construction in which he was put in order to make him conform. It is unsettling at least the idea of this central Man, the Subject, who organizes and constitutes reality around him through the power of his reason, is not a natural state of humanity, but a historical construct, an ideological role which humans were put to play. Michel Foucault in *Let mots et les choses – une archéologie des sciences humaines* draws this conclusion:

> The relatively late development of human sciences – economy, psychology, philology etc. is an indicator of the historical moment in which their object of inquiry, the human Subject, appeared, as a theoretical construct; [...] the eighteenth century did not hand down to them, in the name of man or human nature, a space, circumscribed on the outside but still empty, which it was then their role to cover and analyze. The epistemological field traversed by the human sciences was not laid down in advance: no philosophy, no political or moral option, no empirical science of any kind, no observation of the human body, no analysis of sensation, imagination, or the passions, had ever encountered, in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, anything like man; for man did not exist [...]. (Foucault 1970, 344)

Foucault’s point of view is that human sciences did not discover man, as physics discovered the atom – an empirical fact waiting to be investigated. On the contrary, it is these very scientific discourses that created Man in the sense of a Subject, as we now talk about it. Foucault further notes: “they appeared when man constituted him-self in Western culture as both that which must be conceived of and that which is to be known” (Foucault 1970, 345). And it is exactly this that the subject appears to be – a product of a culture; the moving of human being from a free individual to a product of a culture and a history is the element which in this case creates the crisis. So, the traditional view of the XVII\(^{th}\) or XVIII\(^{th}\) century of some philosophers like Hobbes, Rousseau or Locke that society is the product of the Subject which moves on from a natural
existence to existence in an organized society is inverse. It is not the Subject who created society but society that created the Subject – here is the core of the postmodern crisis as it is felt by the individual and here is what Ginsberg rebels against. If the Subject is just a product of society, a product of a culture, of a history, then this cannot be our authentic way of being. He is imposed onto us and we are molded into a shape by that flattening force, killer of individual freedom, that he calls Molloch. We must come out from underneath this pressure to find ourselves again; and we don’t find ourselves as subjects, but we find ourselves living in the space of inter-subjectivity, meaning the space in which free individuals express themselves and interact with each other.

The postmodern deconstruction of the subject comes, as we have seen, from many directions. It can come from an epistemological point of view, as for example Lyotard saw it, and in this respect it is closely related to the questioning of the legitimacy of truth and representation; when objectivity and truth are narratives so is the Subject – a final grand narratives that must be overcame. At Derrida we can see the deconstruction of subjectivity from an onto-metaphysical perspective; by continuing the line of the destruction of the metaphysical tradition began by Heidegger, Derrida critiques the metaphysical essentiality of the Subject. He cannot be the central point of metaphysics anymore because the conditions which made him such – his permanent unity always being present and his constituting character, can no longer be justified when difference is recognized. The subject must be deconstructed and along with him the whole metaphysical history. At Foucault we had found an historic-social perspective of the concept of Subject and this had to be left behind as a product of the discourses of human science who tried to investigate it, a form created by society to take individuals into a certain point, in a certain order.

What is left now is to ask the question: if we have deconstructed the Subject and we left it beside us, where are we left, what is the state in which we are now, how are we now after this deconstruction? The crisis from which we started when we first deconstructed and dismissed the Subject can be overcome or it is a state of fact of the free individual and we cannot escape this postmodern crisis?
To answer this question we must go back to the point from which we began, a point seen also by Foucault. The Subject is the way in which we have built ourselves, in which we have imagined and represented ourselves. But because of this we are shown an opening that exists here. For if the Subject is not our *being-ness* but only a reflection of a choice, this means we can choose any possibility. And it is exactly this freedom that now lies before us that is the way out of the crisis.

Of course, setting aside the Subject leaves us without the fundamental structure that secular humanism has built. A structure which we *believed* was in us, in our very being, legacy of a scholastic disoriented between transcendence and the mundane, recovered by the early modernity and exploited until now. We are not interested here in the history of this structure, but in the fact that it is a structure in which, at some point along the way, we chose to believe in. It is a shock at first to transform truth in a structure in which sometimes we chose to believe in; the same happens with every other narrative and the reverberations of this cultural shock we can most acutely see in the revolt of man against God. In this perspective God Himself becomes a structure in which we chose to believe and this belief perpetuated over the ages. Nietzsche, for example, believed that by laying aside the burden of believing in such a structure, only then can we be truly free. So, to each his own, as far as beliefs, narratives and structures go. But why if we put aside such traditional perspectives must we find ourselves in a crisis? It is clear that we are in a permanent relationship with ourselves, but this relationship is, if we used a term coined by Pierce, a Dynamic Object. It is something that we relate to, but which always eludes our direct contact. For Pierce the Dynamic Object is defined by his absence, which becomes his way of being; but absence has many meanings.

If we take absence outside temporality – the dynamic object is not absent in the sense that although it is inaccessible now it was or will be at some point in time accessible (and here I am referring to Eco’s understanding of Pierce’s idea of a Dynamic Object\(^3\)) – we can understand absence as the lack of being immediately-there, which is in

\(^{3}\) See Umberto Eco, “The limits of interpretation” in *Unlimited Semiosis and Drift*. 
its nature an open possibility (*dynamis*). Our relationship to this Dynamic Object creates interpretations, one of them being this structure we name Subject. There is a permanent confusion at work here between our relationship with ourselves (my relationship with me) and our beingness; they are both Dynamic Objects and the Subject appears in their interpretation which is their actualization. So we can see that all these great narratives, the Subject being the most prominent one, are nothing but interpretations, actualization of a potentiality; if we continue the semiotic perspective we opened by appealing to Pierce, they are meanings that we give to a signifier, they are contents. So where is the postmodern crisis here? If we put aside the Subject we are not left empty and naked, but we return to a Dynamic Object – our being-ness, we return to their power (*dynamis*) of being. And we can build in place another narrative, another interpretation. It is thus clear that we cannot escape this existential hermeneutic act, for every time we will relate to our beingness as a Dynamic Object we will give a meaning through a signifier, an Immediate Object. Thus, if the Subject is a structure meant to make our own beingness accessible, it is clear now that we can replace it with anything else. And because this structure is just an interpretation, a meaning that we attached, it cannot have truth-value any more and thus, the question of truth here becomes irrelevant.

In conclusion, the Subject or subjectivity has appeared to us as just an interpretation of our very own beingness, taken as a Dynamic Object and following its deconstruction, the apparent crisis which opens becomes just an opportunity for a new interpretation of our power of being. In *A secret miracle*, Borges imagines a catalog of eternities whose first volume contained all the different such eternities, beginning with “the immutable Being of Parmenides” (Borges 2000); all these eternities are exposed as different narratives, interpretations of the idea of eternity. This is the image that we find here; the Subject is just an interpretation, one of the many possible, of the idea of Man. And its deconstruction does not bring on a crisis, but opens up a possibility (*dynamis*).
REFERENCES