

# Fortunes of the Feminine\*

René Descarte is seated at his writing table, observing the objects laid out before him. He knows them well, for it is with them that he spends the better part of his days.

Suddenly one of them appears foreign to him, not like the others. He is forced to admit this because he cannot take his eyes off it: It's the musical score his teacher Isaac Beeckman had given him a few months previously.

His hands turn it over and over, caressing it.

The unexpectedness of this encounter fills him with wonder. He writes the date on the first page:

January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1619.

Other words come to him. He notes them down:

“The fear of God is the beginning of wisdom.”

A wink at the Jesuits, who made him aware of so many things.

Then he is gripped by the fear the actor feels as he emerges from the wings backstage. He hears the rustling of his pen on the paper and discovers what his own action is writing:

“On the verge of entering the world stage, I come forth masked” (*larvatus prodeo*).”<sup>1</sup>

He recalls that in the order of antiquity actors called onto the stage had to wear a mask (*persona*) in order to prevent the blush staining their brows from being seen.

They were fully alone, he thinks, in this confrontation with the audience's gaze.

He on the other hand is never alone, he is in the presence of God.

He gives thanks to the Latin tongue, not as dead as all that, which is lending him its ground; when he writes “*prodeo*,” he reads and hears “*pro Deo*,” before God, for God.

The continuum of the cry made by the ink deposited on the blank page is no longer foreign; he recognizes the call of God. The dawning consciousness of this hidden meaning frees him. He lets himself go:

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<sup>1</sup> Preamble to *Cogitationes Privatae*

God empowers each of us to find our places in the ladder of being and we love him because he occupies the highest rung. What is extraordinary in this is that in loving him we are loving ourselves and our neighbor as ourselves because we are all on the same rung. The neighbor love that takes root in the conjoining of Being and Love is the greatest of the commandments to arise out of divine love.

The created being must be masked in God's presence not because he is a jealous God, but rather because, as divine love, he is the origin of all being(s). Descartes hears the music of being in its true C-major key: God is the master/self-being of Being (*m'être de l'être*). He is exultant.

"I think therefore I am," *cogito ergo sum*, comes to his mind. He wants to write it down, but cannot. Seized with angst: it is no longer he who is reading the final note, it is it that is laying hold of him. He is face to face with the Abyss. The theater of Being has disappeared.

The psychoanalyst opera singer was on the lookout for this moment of rupture in order to begin to speak. He comes forth, borne by that which inhabits him and which he inhabits, language. He is not thinking in this moment about going onstage. He never hesitates, not even for a moment:

It is true that love addresses some semblance at that other semblance known as Being, because it aims to touch the self-image as the dressing up that envelops the object cause of desire.

But above all, there is something else that the experience can stage an encounter with one day or another, and which constitutes one of psychoanalysis' primary steps forward: *jouissance* addresses and receives some semblance as well.

The Cartesian *cogito* was not wrong to place Being atop the summit, but this note from January 1, 1619 reshuffles the deck in 1637, in the aftermath. The angst Descartes feels is proof of this.

It points toward a Knowledge of Being that does not know itself, that does not demonstrate itself, which must be enjoyed. A knowledge that is not learned (*apprendre*), which is to be ap-prehended (in two words – [*à prendre*]).

An encryption (*chiffrage*) that conveys being into letter (*qui pass l'être à la letter*). Beyond the signified. "Edupation" (Lacan), an event that enfolds the subject both enjoyed and enjoying: speaking, singing, writing, dancing... Quite a bit of time was needed in order for this saying to be able to be said.

Dearest Aletheia is not the unveiling of something hidden beneath the mask, not even the Iron one, by the meaning of words. She is related to the time needed for the elaboration of a knowledge whose significance is connected to "the fact that one

has to leave some skin behind in order to have it, to the fact that it is easier to acquire it than it is to have the enjoyment of it” (Lacan, 20/3/1973).

The psychoanalyst also proposes to say that which comes, words, those right old words in which the downfall of semblance is looked for. Use meaning to such an extent that the Other thing, the Thing, resonates.

The predominant function here is that of use rather than exchange, because psychoanalysis gloms over the acquired stupidity of common sense and effects a decanting operation that is indispensable to the condensation that presides over the avenue leading to the field of metaphor.

The opera bears striking witness to this: the libretto’s value or “significance” [*valeur*] depends less on what the words are saying than on the experience of enjoyment that their singing makes heard in the voice of the vowels in which resonates something “never-before-heard” that pertains to the aborescence of the harmonics that appear therein, forever in different ways.

The Philosopher can’t get over this. He would never have thought that mere words could lead to this hint at an unlooked for knowledge.

Descartes, incredible for having rendered possible the transmission of a knowledge that surpassed him. Beeckman, ingenious for having been its instigator.

Nothing is as it was before. An other mode of enjoyment begins to take on worth.

“On the verge of entering the world stage, I come forth masked,” because the data of thinking matter is as thick as thieves with that of extended matter in a way that stifles “a” (“*une*”) *jouissance* that costs dearly (*beau-côût*) by virtue of its being “ex-two,” beyond the legal designation into two categories: Men on one side, Women on the other.

This secreting away is not within the grasp of just everyone.

The subject is not that subject who communicates. This is one of the ideals our thought entertains as it suffers through its being. Unconscious, the subject is the effect of a ceaseless tug of war between the universality of “All” men and the production of “a” (“*une*”) Woman in a discourse that emerges in a flash, analytic discourse.

When *jouissance* enters the world stage, language is revealed at its interpreter via the indefinite article “an” to “an” (or “one by one”).

Language is the condition of the unconscious and not the reverse, it urges the speaking being towards that which is “un-calculable” about *jouissance*.<sup>2</sup> Unconscious, Un-bewusst.

The unconscious is not that a being thinks, but that while speaking it enjoys. There is a strange bond that presides over the appearance of speech that stages the sexed being of these “Not-all” Women.

“What does the Woman want?” The right of the Feminine is not hidden beneath the definite article. It opens onto the infinity of the indefinite. It proves inadmissible.

By emphasizing sexuality, Freud did not know he was leaving himself in the hands of the fortunes of the feminine. It would take a Lacan to pass beyond it.

The ordinal is surpassed by the cardinal: in the beginning there was three, the Real is three, it is not third, experiencing (it) is the only way to grasp it, at the point which we are.

The time it needs is that time which it cracks open (*faille*)...

“Leave it to the scythe of time” (La Fontaine, Fables, XII, 20).

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Both the one and the other are attempts to translate with words that which escapes them, the Real of the Feminine in which speaking being is forever losing itself. Its actuality or relevance for the now stems from the fact that this is ongoing, something which the psychoanalyst may bear witness to based on the codified experience otherwise known as the analytic discourse written by Lacan with four letters, meaning with that which is not already defined by a precise meaning.

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<sup>2</sup> TR: in French the “*un*” *calculable de la jouissance*, which is a re-writing of “incalculable,” replacing the “in” with the masculine indefinite article, “un.” This is then recapitulated in the next two concepts.