

National Research University “Higher School of Economics”

*in Cotutelle with*

The University of Paris VIII or University of Vincennes in Saint-Denis

*as a manuscript*

**Pertseva Alina**

**SUBJECT’S VISIBILITY IN CONTEMPORARY FRENCH PHILOSOPHY**

Summary of the PhD thesis

Academic supervisors:

Nina Sosna, PhD (‘candidate of science’)

Patrick Vauday, PhD (‘docteur’)

Moscow, Paris – 2018

## GENERAL DESCRIPTION

### **The relevance of the study**

The ever-growing interest in the visibility is a distinctive feature of the French philosophy of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its approaches to visibility are extremely diverse: the visibility in the French philosophy can be sensual, intelligible or even metaphorical; imaginative or non-visual; optical or haptic; illuminating or blinding; phantom, deceptive, illusory or evident; repressive, objectifying and subjugating or emancipating; social, public or theatrical, aesthetic; virtual, simulant and baroque, just semblance or pertaining to the conditions of visibility and invisibility in general, etc. The revaluation and the proliferation of the visible couldn't help but be compliant with rethinking of the subject, who became hence not commensurate with its traditional understanding.

The subjects of the French philosophy are thus no less varied. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this concept, extremely multivalent in French (logical subject, grammatical subject, subject of power, subject of submission, subject for intellectual consideration, subject of a work of art, subjectivity, subject as a person, a live being, Subject of metaphysics, subject of action, etc.) was brought in the focus of the fierce disputes polarizing the philosophical community. But the subjects of contemporary French philosophy are not only diverse, but also multiple: since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to our days we can witness a tendency of abandonment of the single solipsistic subject as the theoretical reference point in favor of the inherent multiplicity of the subjects. It is this tendency that makes the topic of their visibility especially relevant. Visibility of the subject ceases to be exclusively marginal and colored with narcissistic pathology where mutual appearance of subjects to each other becomes a not less (and at times and more) important motive than the direct contact of ego-consciousness with itself. The rethinking of the subject of vision involve thus a necessity to include her/him in the visible too.

The problem at stake here is not that of reducing this variety of approaches

to the uniform concepts of “visibility” and “subject”, but that of analyzing the conditions under which the philosophical articulation of these two polysemantic concepts becomes possible. Their definition thus is not a starting point, but an open question. How should we conceive of the subject to make his/her visibility thinkable? How should we conceive of the visible to make the subject pertaining to it? However, the problem is not reducible to a simple combinatory analysis. For, despite the increasing relevance of the topic of visibility of subjects in the contemporary French context, its introduction into the philosophical field meets with certain resistance. This resistance characterizes first of all a theoretical field and may be ignored among the practitioners or art critics unfamiliar with the philosophical theory<sup>1</sup>: the problem is that of *theorizing* visibility of the subject consistently, uncontroversially. After all, it’s not having been theorized before is to be explained not only by its being marginal or stigmatized status, but, apparently, also by the impossibility to theorize it.

The resistance in question has to do with a stable negative correlation between visibility and subject that is characteristic not only of the French philosophy. In the Modern philosophy in general, the subject has traditionally remained invisible. But s/he was invisible not in the same way as s/he was inaudible, intangible or, in principle, immaterial, but due to the specific reasons. According to the widespread interpretation, in the Modern metaphysics, despite a certain mistrust in the sensual vision, it is the vision that served traditionally as the model of intellectual activity (contemplation, intuition, etc.) and the paradigm of perception in general. The “ocularcentric” model, in terms which of the Modern philosophy is often characterized, defines the subject as the one who sees without being seen, the vision - as directed from the subject to the object, and the visibility - as the visibility of the object. Apparently, the subject has traditionally remained a

---

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the art critics who don’t use the word ‘subject’ as a specific philosophical concept, conveniently reason about the subject’s image (*Costantini M. L’image du Sujet*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002), facing the subject (Portraiture. Facing the Subject / ed. by J. Woodall. Manchester, N.Y.: Manchester University Press, 1997) or the necessary link between the bourgeois subject and the classical portrait (*Buchloh B.H.D. Residual Resemblance: Three Notes on the Ends of Portraiture // Face-off. The Portrait in Recent Art / ed. by M.E. Feldman. Philadelphia: Institute of contemporary art, 1994. P. 53-69*).

“blind zone” of philosophy, having been structurally invisible. Despite the variety of explanations and interpretations of this structural invisibility (imperceivable<sup>2</sup>, unimaginable<sup>3</sup>, irrepresentable as the subject<sup>4</sup>, etc.) and the difference in understanding who/what the subject is, the split into an invisible subject and visible objects is recurrent in the Modern philosophy. Everything or everyone that becomes visible (be it even metaphorical non-sensual vision), automatically falls into the category of objects contrasted to the subject as the “source” of vision - even the subject her/himself as the object of self-contemplation. And all this is despite the importance of the topic of reflexivity (another visual metaphor that will be analyzed in detail, the mirror *topos* used as an example) for the Modern subject. The presupposed reflexivity allows only to bypass the topic of structural invisibility of the subject, not resolving it: as transparent, the reflexive subject can't catch the eye of the others.

One may even assume, as, for instance, Hans Jonas<sup>5</sup> did, that it is exactly the adoption of vision as the model of thinking and perception in general that forms the basis of a sharp opposition between the subject and the object, characteristic of the Modern philosophy (it is commonly assumed that the other senses are much more predisposed to the transfusion of the sensing with the sensed, whereas vision, on the contrary, increases the distance between them). The contemporary French philosophy has both contributed to the critics of the ocularcentric traditions (as, for example, in the case of a kind of “iconoclasm” of Emmanuel Levinas stating that “It is incontestable that objectification operates in the gaze in a privileged way”<sup>6</sup>)

---

<sup>2</sup> See for instance in Berkeley whose “esse est percipi” is supposed to be one of the most vivid examples of the Modern philosophy ocularcentrism: “Such is the Nature of Spirit or that which acts, that it cannot be of it self perceived, but only by the Effects which it produceth” (*Berkeley G. A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge/ ed. by D.R. Wilkins. Dublin: David Wilkins, 2002. P. 19*).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance in Descartes whose *cogito* will be further firmly associate with the subject's birth: “the corporeal things of which images are formed in my thought, and which the senses investigate, are known with much more distinctness than this puzzling ‘I’ which cannot be pictured in imagination” (*Descartes R. Meditations on First Philosophy // Oeuvres de Descartes. Vol. VII / ed. Ch. Adam, P. Tannery. Paris : Vrin, 1904. P. 29*.)

<sup>4</sup> See for instance in Kant whose subject in the “Critique of Pure Reason” can contemplate itself only as a phenomenon and never as the subject.

<sup>5</sup> *Jonas H. The Nobility of sight // The Phenomenon of life. Toward a philosophical biology. N.Y.: Harper & Row Publishers, 1966. P. 146-147.*

<sup>6</sup> *Levinas E. Totality and Infinity. An essay on exteriority / trans. by A. Lingis. The Hague, Boston, London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979, p. 189.*

and reproduced it on the own grounds - for example, by calling into question the opposition between touch and sight. In this latter instance the vision could really have lost the link with objectiveness, but this usually happened together with the disposal of the subject, that is in the subjectless philosophies. This only confirmed, albeit on a different material, the existence of a negative correlation between visibility and the subject. Thus, in the French philosophy, it amounted to both the criticism of the privilege of the vision (forming, according to this approach, the basis for the opposition of the subject to the object), and the criticism of the subject (to which we, in this case, are believed to owe the objectifying concept of vision).

Against this background, the reserved and careful attempts to introduce the topic of visibility of the subject into the philosophical discourse of some French philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, with whom we tend to associate the inauguration of the visible into serious philosophical consideration, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the philosopher of the visible *par excellence*, Jacques Rancière, a theorist of the public visibility, and Jean-Luc Nancy, a “philosopher of the portrait” (according to the characterization of Jérôme Lèbre<sup>7</sup>), attract particular attention. At first sight, these philosophers do not have much in common, they extremely seldom refer to the works of each other and, sure enough, to the common results in the field of visibility of the subject. They all belong to different philosophical traditions and use different intellectual strategies to theorize visibility, the subject and their articulation. The topic of visibility of the subject in such general wording can hardly be specified as central for their work of really consolidating them. Nevertheless, the theoretical strategies of these philosophers share the effort to resolutely overcome the thinking habits of their intellectual context, and even more widely – the intellectual epoch, to theorize one of the manifestations of the subject's visibility. For negative correlation between visibility and the subject can be overcome only in case of serious reorganization of the whole field of the conceivable, and not just separate concepts of “visibility” or “subject”. Therefore, the very emerging of this topic is already an indicator of such reorganization,

---

<sup>7</sup> Lèbre J., Nancy J.-L. *Signaux sensibles. Entretien à propos des arts*, Montrouge: Bayard, 2017. P. 5.

though its consistent theorizing is not warranted by it: as we will see later, it will involve individual and often very personal theoretical efforts of the above-named authors along the difficult third way of response to the structural invisibility of subjects chosen by them – the way between the extremities of severe criticism of vision and scathing criticism of the subject. The four authors appear thus as key thinkers that disparately put in relief the effort needed to elaborate this response.

Thus, theorizing of the subject's visibility is a certain “challenge” for the contemporary French philosophy: simultaneously as an exigent problem, as a requirement of immediate interest and as an invitation to a competition with the intellectual clichés and thinking habits. And as such it has not been studied yet.

### **Extent of prior investigation of the topic**

The topic of the subject's visibility as a problem of contemporary French philosophy is covered in the relevant literature extremely poorly. Any observations, even if found, are usually limited to separate, rather casual remarks. The most profuse argument on the topic we found was in one of the chapters of the book by Frédéric Rambeau “The Second Lives of the Subject: Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan”<sup>8</sup>. In his study, the author propagates the thesis that against the background of the structuralist critics of the linguistic subject, it is at the level of the visible that the “dissolving and creative dynamics of subjectivization” becomes apparent. Nevertheless, Rambeau's study does not make a claim for consistency or completeness, being limited to the analysis of one case only (implicit polemics between Foucault and Lacan related to the interpretation of Velázquez' “Las Meninas”).

We shall consider the following texts as the examples of the seminal philosophical statements testifying to incompatibility of visibility and subjectivity in contemporary French philosophy: Sartre's fragment on the gaze from “Being and Nothingness”<sup>9</sup> in its traditional interpretation associating the situation of

---

<sup>8</sup> *Rambeau F.* Les Secondes Vies du Sujet. Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan. Paris: Hermann, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> *Sartre J.-P.* Being and Nothingness. An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology/ trans. H.E. Barnes. N.Y.: Philosophical Library, 1956. P. 252-302.

“being visible under the gaze of the Other” with objectivization; a fragment on panopticism from “Discipline and Punish”<sup>10</sup> by Foucault where visibility in the panoptic *dispositif* is associated with subjugation; Derrida's “Memoirs of the Blind. The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins”<sup>11</sup> showing the impossibility to distinguish a self-portrait from a simple portrait solely at the level of the visible, that is the representation of the subject of representation from any another representation.

However, the text by Jean-Paul Sartre can be read from another point of view also. Besides the traditional approach to commenting on this fragment we already mentioned, widespread in the literature, especially in the so-called “critical studies”, it is possible to find some more sophisticated interpretations. The most ingenious and convincing treatment of the Sartre's fragment on the gaze against this prevailing approach was proposed by Rudolf Bernet in the article “To see and be seen. The invisible phenomenon of the gaze and painting”<sup>12</sup>, in which he showed how the gaze of Sartre's Other not only objectifies the I-conscience, but also makes it possible *to see* the Other as a subject, that is, subjectifies it. Nevertheless, according to Bernet, the Other's gaze in Sartre remains “*an invisible phenomenon*”. The thesis of invisibility of the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” should thus be analyzed regarding its conformity to Sartre's earlier key texts, indirectly devoted to the topics of visibility and the subject – “The Imaginary”<sup>13</sup> and “The Transcendence of the Ego”<sup>14</sup>. In his interpretation, Bernet does not take these texts into consideration, which nevertheless, as we will try to show later, have a significant impact on the choice of the relevant strategy of interpretation of the text.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Sartre's contemporary and colleague, later spoke

---

<sup>10</sup> Foucault M. Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison / trans. by A. Sheridan, N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1995. P. 170-177.

<sup>11</sup> Derrida J. Mémoires d'Aveugle. L'Autoportrait et Autres Ruines. Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1990.

<sup>12</sup> Bernet R. Voir et être vu. Le phénomène invisible du regard et la peinture // Revue d'esthétique. N. 36. 1999. P. 37-47.

<sup>13</sup> Sartre J.-P. The Imaginary. A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination / trans. by J. Webber. London, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Sartre J.-P. The Transcendence of the Ego. A sketch for a phenomenological description / trans. by A. Brown. London, N.Y.: Routledge, 2004.

about the subject's visibility more openly. During the last period of his creative activity, in the unfinished work “The Visible and the Invisible”<sup>15</sup>, he made it his mission to theorize the seer's visibility. The framework for the interpretation of this program, especially as regards to the concept of the subject of “The Visible and the Invisible”, was developed by the comments of Renaud Barbaras<sup>16</sup>. The article by Pierre Cassou-Noguès<sup>17</sup> on the notion of the subject in “The Visible and the Invisible” can also be considered as an important complement to the analysis made by Barbaras. Nevertheless, the comments of these authors require due systematizing and development adjusted for the topic of our study. Of no lesser importance is that Merleau-Ponty did not come to the ideas of “The Visible and the Invisible” at once, and one should also pay attention to how his theory of visibility was gradually prepared in the polemics with Sartre in the courses of lectures read by Merleau-Ponty in the mid-1950s: the course on psychology and pedagogic of the child<sup>18</sup> read in Sorbonne in 1949-1952 and the course read in 1954-1955 in Collège de France and devoted to the topic of passivity<sup>19</sup>. More relevant for interpretation of these texts are the comments of Emmanuel de Saint Aubert<sup>20</sup> who scrupulously reconstructed in his studies the intellectual context proceeding from which the most innovative solutions and concepts of the late Merleau-Ponty were born. It is also necessary to mention the monograph written by Annabelle Dufourcq<sup>21</sup> in which she gives a detailed analysis of the formation of the theory of

---

<sup>15</sup> Merleau-Ponty M. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Followed by working notes / trans. by A. Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

<sup>16</sup> The most seminal among them are Barbaras R. *De l'Être du Phénomène*. Sur l'Ontologie de Merleau-Ponty. Grenoble: Million, 1990; Barbaras R. *Tournant de l'Expérience: Recherches sur la Philosophie de Merleau-Ponty*. Paris: Vrin, 1998. For us, some of his later articles are of particular interest: Barbaras R. *The Ambiguity of the Flesh // Chiasmi International*. 2002. N. 4. P. 19-25; Barbaras R. *Les Trois Sens de la Chair*. Sur une Impasse de l'Ontologie de Merleau-Ponty // Chiasmi International. Vol. 10. 2008. P. 19-32.

<sup>17</sup> Cassou-Noguès P. *La Définition du Sujet dans Le Visible et l'invisible // Merleau-Ponty aux Frontières de l'Invisible / sous la dir. de Cariou M., Barbaras R., Bimbenet E.* Milan: Mimesis, 2003. P. 163-183.

<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty M. *Child Psychology and Pedagogy*. The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952 / trans. by T. Welsh. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Merleau-Ponty M. *Institution and Passivity*. Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954-1955) / trans by L. Lawlor and H. Massey. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> For the moment, his key books are the following : *De Saint Aubert E. Du Lien des Êtres aux Éléments de l'Être: Merleau-Ponty au Tournant des Années 1945-1951*. Paris: Vrin, 2004 ; *De Saint Aubert E. Le Scénario Cartésien. Recherches sur la Formation et la Cohérence de l'Intention Philosophique de Merleau-Ponty*. Paris: Vrin, 2005 ; *De Saint Aubert E. Vers Une Ontologie Indirecte. Sources et Enjeux Critiques de l'Appel à l'Ontologie Chez Merleau-Ponty*. Paris: Vrin, 2006 ; *De Saint Aubert E. Être et Chair I. Du Corps au Désir: l'Habilitation Ontologique de la Chair*. Paris: Vrin, 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Dufourcq A. *Merleau-Ponty: une ontologie de l'imaginaire*. Springer: 2011.

relationship between imagination and perception of Merleau-Ponty, though does not devote particular attention to the role of the visibility of another-subject in this context. Another description of the visibility of the subject as a special visibility of *cogito* demonstration, alternative to that of “The Visible and the invisible”, can be also found in the last, unfinished, course by Merleau-Ponty “The Cartesian Ontology and the Ontology of Today”<sup>22</sup>.

Jacques Rancière, another author quite openly theorizing the subject’s visibility, in his political texts of late 1980ies-1990ies, formulated the imperative of subjectivization in the terms of “becoming visible, becoming subject” (though he did not specially dwell on the problematical character of the link between the subject and the visible for philosophy). This imperative is thematized in the two key collections of political texts by Rancière: “On the Shores of Politics”<sup>23</sup> and “Disagreement”<sup>24</sup>. From the point of view of aesthetics, in Rancière's later texts the topic of the subject's visibility receives a different interpretation, its most complete and unequivocal statement contained in the “The Politics of Literature”<sup>25</sup>. Although there is a sufficiently extensive group of Rancière's analysts already existing, we have not found any study focused on his theory of visibility of subjects. This deficit is partially compensated by interviews with Rancière<sup>26</sup> where he frequently formulates his stand more clearly and definitely. Conversations and statements are included in the heritage of Rancière in their own rights on a par with more traditional forms of philosophical expression.

The texts of Jean-Luc Nancy in which he develops the topic of a portrait of the subject also attract our attention here as we treat it as one of the manifestations of the subject of our study. In his fragmentary corpus, one can find at least four

---

<sup>22</sup> Merleau-Ponty M. Notes des Cours au Collège de France. 1958-1959 et 1960-1961. Paris: Gallimard, 1996. P. 160-267.

<sup>23</sup> Rancière J. On the Shores of Politics / trans. by L. Heron. London, N.Y.: Verso, 1995.

<sup>24</sup> Rancière J. Disagreement. Politics and Philosophy / trans. by J. Rose. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Rancière J. The Politics of Literature / trans. J. Rose. Cambridge, Malden: Polity, 2011.

<sup>26</sup> Basically we deal with two collected works: Rancière J. Et Tant pis pour les Gens Fatigués. Entretiens. Paris: Amsterdam, 2009 и Rancière J. The Method of Equality. Interviews with Laurent Jeanpierre and Dork Zabunyan / trans. by J. Rose. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2016.

texts on this topic: the chapter “Larvatus pro Deo” from his *Ego Sum*<sup>27</sup>, the chapter “The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses” from “The Muses”<sup>28</sup>, a separate essay “The Look of the Portrait”<sup>29</sup> and a later one – “The Other Portrait”<sup>30</sup>. The secondary literature hardly covers the topic, only separate remarks in the texts by Ian James<sup>31</sup>, Susanna Lindberg<sup>32</sup>, Jean-Pol Madou<sup>33</sup>, Helen Petrovsky<sup>34</sup> and Nina Sosna<sup>35</sup> could be found. In her “Oblique trajectories”<sup>36</sup>, Antonia Birnbaum also makes some insightful observations on the interrelations between Rancière’s and Nancy’s subjects, but they need to be nuanced with regards to our topic. Nancy’s own point of view on the question of the subject is developed in the most extended way in his lecture “Un sujet?”<sup>37</sup>. His interviews<sup>38</sup> also prove to be useful for the purpose of clarification of his position.

### **Object and subject-matter of the study**

The object of our study compounds the XX-XXI<sup>st</sup> centuries French thinkers’ theories of the subject. Namely, those of Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jacques Rancière and Jean-Luc Nancy. Its subject-matter being at that the introduction of visibility in the capacity one of its characteristics, i.e. the theoretical articulation of the terms “subject” and “visibility”.

### **Study tasks and objective**

---

<sup>27</sup> Nancy J.-L. *Larvatus pro Deo // Ego sum. Corpus, Anima, Fabula* / trans. by M.-E. Morin. N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2016. P. 39-64.

<sup>28</sup> Nancy J.-L. *The Girl Who Succeeds the Muses // Muses* / trans. by P. Kamuf. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994. P. 41-55.

<sup>29</sup> Nancy J.-L. *The Look of the Portrait // Portrait* / trans. by S. Cliff and S. Sparks. N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2017. P. 13-46.

<sup>30</sup> Nancy J.-L. *The Other Portrait // Portrait* / trans. by S. Cliff and S. Sparks. N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 2017. P. 47-109.

<sup>31</sup> James I. *The Fragmentary demand. An introduction to the philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Lindberg S. *L’inquietant Hegel de Nancy // Europe*. 2009. N. 87. P. 262-268.

<sup>33</sup> Madou J.-P. *Jean-Luc Nancy: Ego sum // La nouvelle revue française*. 1980. N. 334. P. 139-143.

<sup>34</sup> Petrovsky H. *Theory of the Image*. Moscow: RGGU, 2012. P. 122-144. (in Russian)

<sup>35</sup> Sosna N. *The Visual, the Opaque, the Spectral. Image and Photography*. Moscow: NLO, 2011. P. 71-72. (in Russian)

<sup>36</sup> Birnbaum A. *Trajectoires obliques*. Michel Foucault, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Rancière. Paris: Sens&Tonka, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> Nancy J.-L. *Un sujet? // Homme et sujet. La subjectivité en question dans les sciences humaines*. Paris: L’Harmattan. 1992. P. 47-114.

<sup>38</sup> In particular, with regards to our topic: *Martin F., Nancy J.-L. Nium*. In *diessem Sinne. Point final*. Valence: Ecole Regionale des beaux arts, 1993 ; *Girard M., Nancy J.-L. Proprement Dit. Entretien sur le Mythe*. Fécamp: lignes, 2015 ; *Lèbre J., Nancy J.-L. Signaux Sensibles. Entretien à propos des Arts*. Montrouge: Bayard, 2017.

The objective of our study consists in describing the theoretical articulation of the terms “subject” and “visibility” as a problem of contemporary French philosophy. It splits into several research tasks:

1. To define the pivotal theoretical challenges related to the introduction of the topic of the subject’s visibility in contemporary philosophy
2. To specify the key moments of its developments in the history of contemporary French philosophy
3. To identify the basic strategies of the theoretical articulation of the terms “subject” and “visibility”
4. To analyze these strategies: to describe them, to highlight their advances and to outline their limitations

### **Methodological framework of the study**

In our study, we made a choice in favor of the historico-philosophical text interpretation drawing on the existing body of comments and combining it with historical conceptual analysis. This choice is due to the specifics of the study’s subject-matter: on the one hand, the subject’s visibility is a rather discreet topic in the corpus of the above-named authors (i.e. we will more often than not deal with the limited fragments from their texts), but, on the other hand, according to our hypothesis, it involves the groundbreaking theoretical efforts. The chosen strategy will enable us to analyze the particular theoretical solutions thanks to which these authors manage to make conceivable the visibility of the subject; to see how these theories are designed in practice in their texts; and also, to identify the areas of concern avoiding the excessive concentration on the separate fragments of texts and their artificial isolation.

Meanwhile, at times, we will have to recourse to a more broad-scale historical philosophical reconstruction as an additional method. As has already been mentioned, the introduction of the topic of visibility of the subject demands serious reorganization of the whole field of the conceivable and its possibilities,

inaccessible in principle for the analysis by the method of close reading. That's why we will also use the notion of the "philosophical moment" introduced by Frédéric Worms in his study devoted to the contemporary French philosophy<sup>39</sup>. Worms' concept of the "philosophical moment" will make it possible for us to analyze both radical gaps, and elements of repetitions and continuity in this reorganization.

Thus, in our study we will alternately deal with two levels of analysis: the particular level of a textual fragment and a more general level of the philosophical moment.

### **Originality of the study**

1. For the first time, the topic of subject's visibility is described a specific problem of the contemporary French philosophy.
2. The pivotal theoretical challenges related to its introduction are defined.
3. The specificity of the key moments in the history of contemporary French philosophy creating particularly favorable conditions for its development are described.
4. The basic strategies of the theoretical articulation of the terms "subject" and "visibility" are identified and analyzed:
  - a. The possibility of a double-reading of the Sartre's fragment on the gaze from "Being and Nothingness" is demonstrated. An alternative interpretation insisting on the description of the visibility of the Other-subject is suggested. Its inconsistency with Sartre's basic conceptual oppositions is revealed.
  - b. The role of the topic of the Other-subject's visibility in the

---

<sup>39</sup> He argues that the French philosophy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, paying particular attention to gaps in continuity, especially often became the hostage of mutual non-recognition and disregard from various intellectual trends and directions. But even being distinctive from one another, they nevertheless preserve an often well-hidden connection and continuity: "It all looks, in fact, as if in this very particular case [the case of contemporary French philosophy] the sequence of separate philosophical instance were so dense, so clear that they finally came to covering, masking each other, so successfully that we have begun to forget their content, their importance, the relations existing between them, and also those with the wider, open context" (*Worms. F. La philosophie en France au XXe siècle. Moments.* Paris: Gallimard, 2009. P.10).

development of the original Merleau-Pontean conception of relations between perception and imagination, is shown. The treatment of the topic of the subject's visibility in his later unfinished texts – “The Visible and the Invisible” and “The Cartesian ontology and the ontology of today” – is elucidated. The coherence of the Merleau-Ponty's approach is analyzed.

- c. The novelty of Rancière's approach to the theorization of the link between “becoming visible” and “becoming subject” in his political texts against the background of his contemporaries (L. Althusser, M. Foucault, H. Arendt, etc.) is brought to light. The discrepancy between Rancière's treatment of this topic in his political and aesthetic texts is explored.
- d. For the first time, an interpretation of the link between the portrait and the subject in the Nancy's *œuvre* is proposed. The strategic role of the subject's visibility for the transition from the Metaphysics of the Subject to the ontology of the singular plural is demonstrated.

### **Statements to be defended**

1. The topic of visibility of the subject is probably a hardly perceptible, but a steady enough theme in contemporary French philosophy.
2. The growing interest in the topic of visibility of the subject (s) has to do with the tendency towards the gradual refusal of the privilege of the reflexive “transparent” solipsistic subject of self-assurance in favor of an openness to others and the world. Once appeared in the context of Sartre's ambiguous description of a encounter with the Other-subject, this topic is developed by Merleau-Ponty within the framework of the encounter with the world in general (wherein the figure of the Other is leveled), to finally become an important theme in the context of the approaches adopting the shared common experience of initially multiple subjects as a theoretical reference point, where the experience of another becomes an integral part of the relation of oneself-to-oneseff.

3. Meanwhile, the purpose of the philosophical articulation of the terms “visibility” and “subject” turns out to be difficult even for the contemporary French philosophy. On the one hand, the introduction of visibility as a characteristic of the subject presupposes the sophistications of the relations between its aspects of activity and passivity. On the other hand, it entails the sophistication of the relations between the perceived, imagined, symbolical, etc., as the visibility can become a characteristic feature of the subject only provided that its heterogeneity, i.a. a possibility to differentiate between the visibility of the subject and the other, more or less habitual non-subject modalities of the visible.

4. The topic of the visibility of the subject arises in France during the period of penchant for phenomenology, but the optimum conditions for its theorizing are developed in the waning days of (post)structuralism within which complication of relations between the aspects of activity and passivity of the subject, and also between the language and visibility gains a strategic value of overcoming the one-sidedness of the structuralistic subject of submission.

5. In the contemporary French philosophy, it is possible to discern three basic strategies of articulation of the visibility and subjectivity: being-visible of the subject (Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty), becoming-visible of subjectivization (Jacques Rancière) and completing the Subject in the visible (Jean-Luc Nancy). Each of these three strategies is ambiguous in its own way - not so much removing the contradiction between visibility and subjectivity, as more or less successfully exploiting it in its interests:

a. Within the limits of the first strategy, Sartre managed to propose *a description* of the visibility of the Other-subject in the encounter, but the radical dualism of his ontology did not make it possible for him *to theorize* it.

b. Not going far beyond this strategy, the philosophy of late Merleau-Ponty lays the grounds for *theorizing* the visibility of the subject by introducing a polarizing source common for Sartre's dualisms – the flesh of the world. It is as common, shared that the visibility can also further become one of the

characteristics of the subject. And still the unfinished “The Visible and the Invisible” in itself cannot yet serve as “a firm basis” for the theorization of subject’s visibility: on the one hand, it risks running into total indiscernibility between the subject and the object, and, on the other one, to neutralize this risk, it partially retrieves the position of the conscience entering into inconsistent relations with the flesh of the world.

c. Within the framework of the second strategy, Rancière does extensive philosophical work to theorize the “becoming-visible” as an imperative of political subjectivization in the strong sense of the word. Even if his proposition on the visibility of the subject are limited to solely radical political subjectization and do not extend, in particular, on the aesthetics.

d. Within the framework of the third strategy, Nancy proposes an ingenious reflection on the topic of visibility of subjects in art – in portrait art, in particular. This understanding appears to be extremely ambivalent: on the one hand, Nancy shows that it is an aesthetic visibility that makes the subject complete (in sense of accomplished); and on the other one, he demonstrates that it is in the aesthetic visibility that the Metaphysics of the Subject is completed (in sense of bringing to a close) – it is there that the transition to the nancean ontology of the singular plural obviating the subject takes place.

### **Theoretical and practical outcome of the study**

The study results could find their application when preparing the courses on the history of contemporary philosophy and aesthetics, on the theories of the image and the visual – both on their own right and with reference to ontology and philosophical anthropology. They can also get traction when conducting the research on different aspects of visibility/visuality in the contemporary philosophy and culture.

### **Study results approbation**

Some of the particular statements of this study were presented at the following conferences:

XXI<sup>st</sup> International Student, Postgraduate and Young Scientists Conference “Lomonosov-2015”, organized by Lomonosov Moscow State University, 13-17 April 2015 (Paper “Ranciere Reads Schiller: New Relations with Classic Aesthetic Texts”)

VI<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference “Philosophy. Language. Culture”, organized by the School of Philosophy of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 29-30 April 2015 (Paper “Jacques Ranciere: The Philosopher and his Subject”)

European Summer School of Cultural Studies «Politics of East» (Paris, France), 7-13 September 2015 (Paper “Suspension and Equality in Jacques Rancière’s Interpretation of Judgement of Taste”)

International Workshop “Transparency/Opacity”, organized by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, 21-23 March 2016 (Paper “Subject’s Opacity Taken Literally. Merleau-Ponty revisiting Sartre’s transparent consciousness”)

10<sup>th</sup> Annual Seminar “Imagination as an Act: Phenomenological Approaches”, organized by the “Phenomenology” research group of the University of Liege (Belgium), 25-29 April 2016 (Paper “Le regard de l’autre chez Sartre: l’entre-deux de l’imagination et de la perception”)

VIII<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference “The modes of thinking, the ways of speaking”, organized by the School of Philosophy of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 27-30 April 2017 (Paper “Subject as a blind zone”)

## MAIN BODY OF THE THESIS

**In the first part** of the thesis, our attention is focused on the texts of the key French authors identifying themselves with the phenomenological tradition (Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty) who manifest the first attempts to consider the topic of visibility of the subject within the framework of contemporary French philosophy. By and large, this part shows, how the topic of our study first arises in the works of the two above-mentioned French philosophers in the context of their major theoretical efforts aimed at “opening” the solipsistic conscience to the other and to the world. Which is linked to the concept of “gaze”, specific to the French context, being, on the one hand, the inheritor of the ocularcentrism, a trademark of the phenomenology, and on the other hand, its antagonist, that is the sight both seeing and visible. Here we also analyze the intricacies encountered by these authors in their attempts to theorize the topic of the subject's visibility in the terms of “gaze”. The intricacies, which become, as we will try to show, difficult to be resolved within the framework of the approach practiced by them.

In **chapter 1**, we give a minute analysis of the fragment on the gaze from Sartre's “Being and Nothingness” as a kind of inaugural appearance of the topic of visibility of subjects in the contemporary French philosophy. The chapter centers around its key feature – the irresolvable character of the appearance of the subject's visibility in “Being and Nothingness”. First of all, this irresolubility transpires in the possibility of double reading of this fragment. We try to show that it can be interpreted not only in the traditional way, as a demonstration of the power of the gaze of the Other objectifying the conscience, but equally as the peculiar description of the subjectifying visibility of the gaze of the Other-subject, i.e. as a visibility which makes the encounter with the Other as other subject possible. These two interpretations seem not so much to exclude than to complement each other. Secondly, the irresolubility in question is ultimately related to the fact that the description of the gaze of the Other-subject suggested by us, despite the evident legitimacy of such reading, is at odds with the underlying

grounds of Sartre's dualistic ontology laid down in his early texts – “The Imaginary” and “The Transcendence of the Ego”. An attempt to bring the description of the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” into accord with the theses of these two early texts by Sartre forms the topic of the first and second section of Chapter 1, accordingly.

**Section 1.1.** shows the discrepancy between the Sartre's description of the specific visibility of the Other's gaze in “Being and Nothingness” and the underpinning arguments on the visible of his “The Imaginary”, based, let us remind here briefly, on a sharp opposition between the imagined and the perceived. To do that, the **paragraph 1.1.1.** first raises the question of an “aesthetic” (i.e. sensible) dimension of the encounter for Sartre, which mainly occurs on the level of the visible. A special emphasis on the “encounter” as Sartre's main achievement in this fragment enables us to shed some light on the reversibility between the objectivization by the gaze of the Other (on which traditional interpretation of this fragment insists) and the subjectivization of the gaze of the Other, i.e. to show the possibility of the double reading on which our analysis is based. The **paragraph 1.1.2** considers the interpretation of the specificity of the Other's gaze manifestation in Sartre's text proposed by Rudolf Bernet, a well-known Belgian phenomenologist. After considering its merits (emphasizing the link between the gaze manifestation manner and the subjectification) we put into question Bernet's insistence on the invisible character of Sartre's gaze of the Other-subject (according to his terminology, the gaze for Sartre appears to be an “invisible phenomenon”). Thus, it is the first hypothesis that is subjected to test: the gaze of the Other-subject is invisible. In **paragraph 1.1.3.**, Sartre's description of the encounter with the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” is compared with his description of the work of imagination from “The Imaginary” on the basis of their negative definition: suspension of perception. Thus, the second hypothesis on the aesthetic dimension of the encounter in “Being and Nothingness” is tested: the gaze of the Other-subject is imaginary. The conclusion is drawn that the dimension of the "encounter" inevitably makes this analogy

incomplete. In **paragraphs 1.1.4-1.1.1.6** a similar attempt is made to compare the theses of “The Imaginary” with the description of the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” on the basis of three other characteristics which Sartre gives to the image: “quasi-observation” (the other in the gaze, just like in the image, is given at once and in block, but, unlike the subject of image, the Other in his gaze is not determined by our knowledge of her/him), “néantisation” (the gaze, just like the image, allows to pose negativity, but unlike the subject of image, the Other in his gaze exists and is present here and now) and “spontaneity” (imagination is the testimony of absolute freedom of the conscience, whereas the encounter with the Other in the gaze is its limitation). Thus, according to our analysis, a specific visibility of the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” cannot be described in the terms of the “perception/imagination” opposition coined by Sartre in the period of “The Imaginary”. This impossibility is directly linked by us with the illegitimacy of the very problem that the topic of the gaze of the Other-subject is supposed to address in the “Being and Nothingness” – the problem related to the distinction between the Other-subject and the Other-object. Section **1.2** is devoted to the analysis of this problem.

Section **1.2** shows the discrepancy between Sartre's description of the Other-subject encountered in the gaze from “Being and Nothingness” and his most radical theses from “The Transcendence of the Ego” forming the basis of his original philosophy of the conscience and early criticism of the concept of the “subject”. **Paragraph 1.2.1** dwells on the distinction between the Other-subject and the Other-object from “Being and Nothingness” in its relation to the sharp opposition between the conscience and the object brought forward by Sartre in “The Transcendence of the Ego”. The conclusion is drawn that in “Being and Nothingness”, the Other-subject becomes a sort of intermediate reality between the extremities of the conscience and the object. Though such “intermediate reality” seems, according to our analysis, pertinent in the context of description of the encounter of the conscience with the Other-subject, it nevertheless does not fit well into Sartre's sharply dualistic ontology based on an invincible opposition of for-

itself and in-itself. **Paragraph 1.2.2** contains a similar discussion of the distinction between the I-subject and the Me-object in the light of the theses of “The Transcendence of the Ego”. It is possible, as we show, to detect, in the description of the encounter between the conscience with Sartre's gaze of the Other, the elements of what will later be called “subjectivization” (already in its two paradigmatic aspects – those of submission and emancipation), which could explain this distinction and its appearance in the fragment on the gaze of the Other or, at least, make it also pertinent. However, apparently, such a theoretical solution would demand taking the perspective of becoming, not less problematic within the framework of dualism of the “Being and Nothingness”. In the conclusion to this section, we assert that the concepts of the “Other-subject” and “I-subject” are as pertinent to the description of the encounter of the Other, as they are illegitimate from the point of view of the general ontologic sketch of the “Being and Nothingness”.

The overall conclusion drawn from chapter 1 is that Sartre's ambiguous presentation of the encounter with the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” makes it possible to see in it also a unique description of the specific visibility of the Other-subject, different from the visibility of the object; nevertheless, such specific visibility and such specific subject appear to be non-theorized by Sartre. An assumption is made that the visibility of the subject can't be but non-theorized within the framework of dualism which Sartre's ontology basically is. On the ground of the analysis of this chapter we formulate the double constraint of the topic of our study: to theorize the heterogeneity of the visible (irreducible to the “positive”, perceived visible) and to sophisticate the relation between the aspects of passivity and activity in the notion of the subject. Thus, we explain the inadequacy of the description of the gaze of the Other-subject from “Being and Nothingness” to the key oppositions of two of his basic earlier texts with the demand of radical reorganization of the whole space of the conceivable claimed by our topic.

**In the second chapter**, we analyze an attempt of Maurice Merleau-Ponty to

design such theoretical field. In the introduction to chapter 2, the relevance of Merleau-Ponty's endeavor to our study is associated both with his specific interest in the visible, including the visible of the seer, and with a more general accordance of his later philosophical project with the challenges of the topic of our study. According to our analysis of Sartre's fragment on the gaze, the key theoretical challenge of the topic of visibility of the subject is that it demands the abandonment of the dualistic style of thinking (to make conceivable the common between the subject and the visible, traditionally associated with the object's way of being) but can't do it by simply rejecting the subject/object distinction (so as not to lose the specificity of the subject's visibility in comparison with any other visibility). Building on the existing secondary literature, we argue that beginning with the mid-1950ies, Merleau-Ponty has precisely settled down to a course of overcoming of Sartre's dualism without losing its constituting tension. However, the question is whether Merleau-Ponty has actually achieved this aim. It is to the answer to this question that chapter 2 is devoted to, its structure closely following that of chapter 1: the first section analyses Merleau-Ponty's answer to the Sartre's "perceptions/imagination" opposition in connection with the visibility of the Other-subject; the second section is devoted to a later answer given by Merleau-Ponty to Sartre's second opposition – the opposition between conscience and the object in connection with the incomplete reversibility of the visible and the seer.

In **section 2.1.**, based on the material of the lecture courses read by Merleau-Ponty in 1950ies in Sorbonne and in Collège de France, we study the development of his own theory of relations between the perceived and the imagined in his controversy with Sartre. Particular attention is paid to the role of the specific visibility of the Other-subject this answer's elaboration. The importance of this answer for Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of "The Visible and the Invisible" is shown.

In **paragraph 2.1.1.** the first stage of this process is considered – the course read in Sorbonne in 1949-1952 and referred to as "Child Psychology and Pedagogy". In one of the lectures of this course, Merleau-Ponty states the necessity

to revise the contemporary theories of imagination in order to better understand of its role in the life of the child. In this lecture, Merleau-Ponty reproduces in a general way Sartre's theses of "The Imaginary" and proposes the first version of their criticism. As we show, this criticism extends to the problems far beyond the framework of a narrow topic of the role of imagination in the life of the child and touches primarily upon questions of relations with the Other. We try to show that in this first and yet rather approximate version of criticism, the specific visibility of the Other subject plays a key role. According to the Merleau-Ponty of this course, this specificity consists in calling into question the sharp opposition between perception and imagination (in case of the Other, we just can't tell for sure whether a certain quality, response, emotion etc. was really perceived or only imagined by us, as here any verification appears impossible). We analyze in detail the various motives critical to Sartre intertwined in this argument and strengthening it. Nevertheless, eventually, as we try to show, Merleau-Ponty's first attempt to overcome the Sartre's "perception/imagination" opposition remains controversial and does not go far beyond Sartre's very approach to imagination: insisting on a crosspoint between imagination and perception in case of visibility of the Other-subject, Merleau-Ponty still build upon Sartre's distinction of them - if not polarizes it in a more radical manner.

In paragraph **2.1.2.**, we pass on to the second course by Merleau-Ponty, read in College de France in 1954-1955, and devoted to the topic of passivity "The Problem of Passivity: Sleep, the Unconscious, Memory"). It shows a more elaborate stage of the development of his own theory of relations between imagination and perception. In the first part of the course, in which the phenomenon of sleep is analyzed, Merleau-Ponty puts forward five separate arguments against Sartre's "perception/magination" opposition. However, as we try to show, the most effective among them, though still not devoid of contradictions, is the argument of perception/imagination of the Other-subject, in many respects continuing the argument from the Sorbonne course: even when we're awake, the Others seem to us even as a kind of dreams or myths, and this fact is enough to call

into question the “split” between the real and the imagined.

Not limiting ourselves to the analysis of this direct criticism of Sartre's opposition between perception and imagination, continuing the analysis of Merleau-Ponty's College de France course of 1954-1955, we also consider its second part, devoted to the unconscious. Thanks to it, we manage to show how this experience of non-discrimination between perception and imagination is transferred by Merleau-Ponty further from the specificity of the encounter with the Other-subject onto the encounter with the world in general. Having explained in this part of the course the unconscious by analogy with an excess of perception (perception including also non-thetic zones which under certain conditions can be apprehended), Merleau-Ponty began to explain this very excess of perception in the terms of unconscious, and together with it, also in the terms of the imagined. As we try to show, it was at this very moment when Merleau-Ponty switched his interest from the study of the place of the real in the imagined to that of the imagined in the real, that his argument became a really strong criticism of Sartre. The question is however, in this case, to determine the role of the visible and the subject.

Building on Merleau-Ponty's later works (in particular, “Eye and Mind”), we make an attempt to illustrate how, together with this crucial interweaving of imagination into the canvas of perception, Merleau-Ponty integrates the experience of the Other-subject into relations with the world in general, how the motive of the “gaze of things” thus arises and how, finally, the figure of the Other appears to face the threat of indiscernibility/disappearance in the flesh of the world. In the conclusion to this section, it is argued that the most consistent criticism of Sartre's “perception/imagination” opposition leads Merleau-Ponty to undermining the distinction between the visibility of the Other-subject and the visibility of a thing which in his later texts is actually endowed the gaze in the context of his idea of vision as of mutual exchange of visibilities/gaze. Thus, the visibility of perception-imagination of Merleau-Ponty's late texts, alternative to the Sartre's opposition between them, leaves us halfway between the visibility of the object and the

visibility of the subject (subjects).

In section **2.2**, building on the material of Merleau-Ponty's late unfinished works (mainly “The Visible and the Invisible” and working notes to it), we analyze his unconventional theoretical endeavor to elaborate an ontology relevant to his conception of the visible and revising Sartre's dualism. In paragraph **2.2.1**, the criticism by Merleau-Ponty of Sartre's sharp opposition between conscience and the object is linked to Merleau-Ponty's development of a new approach to oppositions overcoming, concretized in his unprecedented concept of “flesh of the world”. The peculiarity of this new approach consists in that at this stage Merleau-Ponty, instead of thinking the common in terms of a “mixture” of two opposite elements (as for example in the case of his answer to Sartre's “imagination/perception” opposition), postulates the common as a more primary basis, the polarization of which provides the very opposition. Such innovative approach, as we show, appears especially relevant for the task of theorizing the visibility as something in common for the seeing subject and the visible world, as something shared by them and dividing them. And nevertheless, under a closer consideration, it becomes obvious that the position of the subject in relation to the “flesh of the world” becomes, at that, hardly definable. In the absence of something similar to the theory of subjectivization, that is, an explanation of how the subject arises/appears out of the general “flesh of the world”, distinguishing her/himself from a thing/object, Merleau-Ponty finds himself submitted to the necessity to resort to the rudiments of the phenomenology of conscience to explain the activity of the seer. At that, this activity turns out to be hardly reconcilable with his radical decision to assume the “flesh of the world” as a theoretical reference. This thesis is promoted progressively as we analyze the nodal points of Merleau-Ponty's argumentation. In paragraph **2.2.2.**, first of all, the controversial idea of “incomplete reversibility” of the vision both in its continuity and in a breach with Husserl's idea of a “double contact”. Secondly, in paragraph **2.2.3**, it is shown that the activity of the seer remains a practical assumption in this idea, without being thematized explicitly and actually denied by it. Thirdly, in paragraph **2.2.4** we

show an inconsistency between the point of view of the philosophy of conscience presupposed by this activity and the point of view of the flesh of the world philosophy, the link between them, in case of Merleau-Ponty, being the concept of “flesh”, as we show relying on the comments by Renaud Barbaras. This inconsistency is illustrated by an example of practical impossibility to accept simultaneously the two points of view – that of the seer and that of the seen, that his model of seeing presupposes. Fourthly, in paragraph **2.2.5**, we analyze the topology of chiasm, as, according to the generally accepted interpretation, it overcomes these contradictions. It is shown, also with reliance on the works by Barbaras, that the idea of chiasm not only fails to overcome the inconsistency between the positions of the seer and the seen, but also, superimposing two aspects of the problem (seer-seen/seen-seer), it actually duplicates this contradiction.

In paragraph **2.2.6**, we also analyze a fragment of an unfinished course of lectures by Merleau-Ponty “The Cartesian ontology and the ontology of today” as an alternative approach to the subject's visibility. In this course, Merleau-Ponty proposes an unorthodox reading of Descartes' *cogito*. His existentialistic interpretation from this course presents the *cogito* as a particular self-manifestation of the subject (the vision of the invisible), distinct from the vision-knowledge described by Descartes, for example, in “Rules for the Direction of the Mind” or “Dioptrics”. In the interpretation of Merleau-Ponty, it appears as a peculiar description of the subject's visibility, lacking in “The Visible and the invisible”, but at the same time, as we show, it enters into complex and controversial relations with the ontology of the flesh of the world, the same as those of the rudiments of conscience in “The Visible and the invisible”. Inspired by the ontology of “The Visible and the invisible”, this interpretation of Descartes appears hardly reconcilable it.

In the conclusions to this chapter, we state that in his unfinished works, Merleau-Ponty not so much designs a theoretical field in which the dualism of the subject and the object could simultaneously be overcome as dualism and remain as a distinction, but rather superimposes two points of view. The point of view of the

philosophy of the flesh of the world and the point of view of the philosophy of conscience alternate with one another failing to constitute an articulated thought. Thanks to his strong decision to assume the “common” as the theoretical reference point shared by the subject and the object, Merleau-Ponty does lay the basis for further theorizing of the visibility of the subject. But choosing for the role of the common “the flesh of the world” put the serious obstacles on Merleau-Ponty’s way to theorizing this subject. The articulation between the subject and the visible remains in his case fluctuating between two scarcely reconcilable traditions and perspectives of theorizing. Not limiting ourselves to this critical analysis, in the conclusions to the chapter, we also outline a further potential of Merleau-Ponty’s radical theoretical project.

In **the intermediate conclusion to part I**, we make an attempt to draw an analogy between the theoretical problems faced by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, and to associate the opportunity for their rethinking with the structuralism and post-structuralism movements taking effect after Merleau-Ponty’s death. Namely, with its concept of subjectivization. The intrigue of the second part of the study is opened by the fact that even with this movement, the visibility of the subject(s) does not automatically become conceivable.

**Part II** is devoted to the study of the topic of visibility of subjects in post structuralism and in the philosophical moment succeeding it, which we call for the purposes of discussion “post deconstructivism”. In the introduction to part II, we show both new possibilities for theorizing subject’s visibility arising with this philosophical moment (introduction of the notion of “subjectivization” shifting the emphasis from “being-subject” to “becoming-subject” and leveling the opposition between the subject and the object), and new theoretical challenges (prerogative of the language over the visible) which formulate an unprecedented format of relations between visibility and the subject: visibility does become a part of the processes of subjectivization, but is associated in so doing solely and exclusively with its axis of subjugation/submission/objectivization, whereas subjectivization in the “strong” sense continues to be associated with invisibility. A hypothesis is

proposed according to which the visible dimension of subjectivization becomes, on the contrary, strategic in the waning years post structuralism.

In **the third chapter**, building upon Jacques Rancière's texts, we study the possibilities of a more radical transformation of the link between visibility and subjectivization within the realm of politics. Such concretizing is far from coincidence: in the French context of 1970ies-1980ies, it is the subject of political practice that comes to the forefront, in many respects taking the shine out of the theoretical subject. In this chapter, we make an attempt to show how Jacques Rancière, a prominent representative of this turn to the theory of practices, succeeds to transform the visibility associated during that epoch mainly with submission (an approach coming to prevail in critical studies following the famous analysis of a panopticon by Foucault in "Discipline and Punish") into a means of resistance on the territory of politics, that is to theorize the activity involved in a seemingly passive situation of visibility. We consider this transformation as a vivid example of theorizing the articulation between visibility and subjectivization in the strong sense of the word. The chapter also takes Rancière's later aesthetic texts to analyze the restrictive guidelines of his approach.

**Section 3.1** is devoted to the clarification of the theoretical and methodological innovations of Rancière enabling him to advance in his political texts of the 1980ies-1990ies the imperative of subjectivization in the terms of "becoming visible - becoming subject". These innovations are analyzed by us against the background of Foucault's approach which, as we show, Rancière borrows in many respects, introducing however some essential alterations which make him stand out as an author from the context of post-structuralism. In **paragraph 3.1.1**, it is shown that the interest to the link between the subjectivization in the strong sense of the word and the idea of panopticism may be traced to the sharp criticism by the young Rancière of Althusser's idea of "subjectless processes", in relation to which Foucault's studies, and, in particular, his "Discipline and punish", play an ambiguous role. They both reproduce Althusser's general approach to subjectivization and open the opportunities to

criticize his idea of “subjectless processes” thanks to the reformulation of the relations between theory and practice. The latter is pushed by Rancière to its limits, and eventually turned against Foucault. Thus, we find out a link between his criticism of “inconsistent materialism” of the subjectless processes of Althusser and his later assumption of common and equal visibility, and, hence, the transformation of visibility from the operator of submission (as it is, for example, in Foucault's famous thesis that “Visibility is a trap”) into an instrument of the verification of equality for political subjects. In **paragraph 3.1.2**, the concept of “police” shared by Rancière and Foucault is used as an example to clearly demonstrate the most global differences of the “theoretical dispositives” of the two authors. It is shown how Rancière, theorizing “policy” as the positive reverse of the “politics”, makes an attempt to go beyond what he classifies as the “determinism” of Foucault’s historical *a priori*, in fact suggesting the possibility to affect these historical *a priori* distributions of the sensible (including the visible/invisible distributions), to call them into question due to their de-historization by those who are traditionally called the “subject of history”. In **paragraph 3.1.3.**, we analyze a more particular transformation of Foucault’s idea of “exception” underlying one of the key concepts advanced by Rancière – the concept of the “distribution of the sensible”, associated, as we show, with historization of invisibility, a more radical than that of Foucault. We demonstrate that it is under the category of structurally “invisible” in the given distribution of sensual that those whom Rancière calls “part of those who have no part” fall. In **paragraph 3.1.4**, it is shown how these two innovations allow Rancière to advance the imperative of subjectivization in the terms of “becoming visible – becoming subject”. Those whom Rancière calls “part of those who have no part”, categorized as structurally invisible in the public space, turn out able to call into question their invisibility and its injustice in Rancière’s texts on politics thanks to his advantageous theoretical assumption of questioning the current distribution of the sensible. For Rancière’s “part of those who have no part” can become visible in the public space if and only if they call into question the current distribution of the

sensible which makes them invisible. Such putting into the question is made possible thanks to the universality of equality characterizing politics as the positive reverse of police. The link between the universality, equality, subject and such understanding of “becoming visible” is elaborately analyzed.

In **paragraph 3.1.5**, building of “Disagreement”, we analyze Rancière’s distinctive theory of the heterogeneous “visible” in politics thanks to which his discourse on the subjectifying “becoming visible” turn out to be possible. In particular, we consider his idea of “appearance” questioning the current distribution of the public visible/invisible in relation to the identities policy corresponding to the latter. Rancière’s theory of visibility-appearance is analyzed as that avoiding two extremities – the extremity of the critical theory and the extremity of the theory of total simulation – due to balancing the rights of reality and visibility while preserving a gap between them. Visibility-appearance is treated as introducing in the field of experience of a certain visible which changes its regime. In **paragraph 3.1.6**, we delve into considering the “fiction”’s contribution into the visibility-appearance by taking into account the notion of “stage” particularly important in the political texts of Rancière. We investigate the troubled relationship with the established tradition of the public stage analysis in the terms of visible (mainly represented by Hannah Arendt), in which Rancière’s concept of a “political stage” enter. Furthermore, we also show the contrast between Rancière’s idea of “political stage” and his idea of “theatrical stage” from the later collected works entitled “The Emancipated spectator”. This contrast is formulated in the terms of becoming visible, necessary in politics and absent in aesthetics, and is associated with the question of the difference between political and aesthetic subjectivization. The study of this difference becomes a task of the following section.

**Section 3.2** is devoted to the exploration of the link between visibility and subjectivization in Rancière’s texts on aesthetics. The philosopher made the latter the object of his assiduous study at the second stage of his creative work, in late 1990ies- early 2000s. This link, as we try to show, appears in these late texts on

different lines, revealing the limitations of his approach.

To study this difference we, first of all, in **paragraph 3.2.1**, show the difference in the approach between Rancière's aesthetics of politics and his politics of aesthetics – a difference that is not evident for the majority of his analysts. We bring focus on the fact that this difference follows, *inter alia*, the line of the subject: if in Rancière's politics, the subjectivization plays a key role, in his aesthetic texts, it is actually absent. Here the hypotheses of the two English-speaking analysts, Bruno Bosteels and Gabriel Rockhill, explaining the absence of subjects in Rancière's aesthetics by his turn to more radical historicism and his abandonment of sharp the opposition between the politics and the police, are put in doubt. To propose an interpretation of the subjects' evanescence from Rancière's aesthetics "closer" to his texts, in **paragraph 3.2.2**, we consider the elucidation of the difference between the two politics (the politics of "Disagreement" and the politics of aesthetics) given by Rancière himself. We focus on Rancière's comment to Schiller's text of "The Letters on aesthetic education of man" which give the French philosopher the material for the most detailed explanation of the deficiency of the politics in the strong sense of the term, associated with subjectivization in his texts of late 1980ies-early 1990ies, in the aesthetics. We thus explore the difference between the two concepts of "aesthetics" found in the works by Rancière in the contexts of an "aesthetics of politics" and a "politics of aesthetics", tracing them back to German idealism and romanticism. As a result, we manage to understand the particular way in which in Rancière's "politics of aesthetics", the heterogeneity of visible (analyzed by us in the previous section on the material of "Disagreement") is transformed from the principle of resistance and condition of the possibility of subjectivization into the principle of withdrawal of politics ("metapolitics"). We find that in the context of these explanations the absence of subjects in the aesthetics of the late Rancière can in fact appear quite explainable by his own political texts. Nevertheless, the difference between the two concepts of "aesthetics" – one rather anhistorical, and the other outlined by rather narrow historical frameworks (German romanticism - nowadays), as shown by us, may

well raise questions.

To answer them, in **paragraph 3.2.3**, we turn to one of the interviews given by Rancière as part of conversations for the collected works “The Method of Equality”. A concern formulated by Rancière in it, provides us an opportunity to portray Rancière’s reading of the Schiller’s “The Letters on Aesthetic Education” and his resort to German romanticism in general, as a forced response to an inconclusive attempt to fix an universality of “literariness” similar to the principle of equality in his politics. Which makes it possible for us to explain the evanescence of the subjects from Rancière’s aesthetics in a formal way, for in his politics, the subjectivization is directly linked to the universality of equality appearing thus impossible in the aesthetics. However, not limiting ourselves to this “formal” conclusion, in this paragraph, we also make an attempt to track empirically the actual disappearance of the subjects from Rancière’s aesthetics building on his texts of the late 1990ies - middle 2000s devoted to the literature. In this analysis, we investigate how together with abandoning the project to find the universality of “literariness”, Rancière gradually comes to interpret the literary individuation (making visible even more effectively than politics) as a complete the antipode to political subjectivization. The logic of becoming brought in these texts to its limit levels the activity principle, which made it possible to associate visibility with subjectivization in politics, transforming thus aesthetic visibility into the principle of desubjectivization. An analogy is drawn with the problems we encountered in Merleau-Ponty’s ontology of the visible and the invisible. In **paragraph 3.2.4**, this new explanation of the subjects’ position in Rancière’s aesthetics is linked with his extremely peculiar criticism of Deleuzian ontology. It is shown how and why this criticism of Rancière borrows the fundamentals and terminology of the ontology of Gilles Deleuze and simultaneously challenges it, throwing doubt upon the thesis of its inevitable politicity and thus transforming the modernist literature, successor of the principles of romantic aesthetics, into the principle of desubjectivization.

In **paragraph 3.2.5**, we sum up these reasonings, questioning the possible

interconnection between the aesthetics of politics' subjectivization and the aesthetic metapolitics' desubjectivization of Rancière's later works. It is there that we suggest having a look for a more nuanced idea of relations between subjectivization and desubjectivization. In the **conclusion** to this chapter, we infer that Rancière's strong thesis on the link between "becoming visible" and "becoming subject" is applicable only to his radical political subjectivization, the interest to which is explained by the philosophical moment following the events of May 1968. The innovations of his political theory, rather unorthodox for a post-structuralistic context, did allow Rancière to theorize this link in politics, but turned out irrelevant, *inter alia*, for aesthetics, a particular interest in which becomes the specificity of the moment of termination of post-structuralism with "post-deconstructivism" coming in its stead.

In **chapter 4**, we turn to an author indicative for this latter moment, another important contemporary French philosopher, Jean-Luc Nancy, in whose creative work we make an attempt to track the development of the topic of a portrait as a special aesthetic dispositive, making the subject of representation visible for others and for him/herself. In the introduction to this chapter, in order to summarize the features differentiating Nancy from Rancière, relevant for our research, we highlight the importance of art for Nancy's ontology and the originality of his approach to the question of the end of the subject, in many respects inspired by German authors (Nietzsche and Heidegger), but irreducible to the simple criticism of a subject. A hypothesis for the further consideration is proposed: it is at the place of specific visibility of the subject's portrait, within the territory of aesthetics, that Nancy makes the transition from the metaphysics of the Subject towards the ontology of the singular plural coming in its stead.

In **paragraph 4.1.1**, we give a general analysis of his conception of relations between the subject and art on the material of Nancy's text being fundamental in this respect and written in co-authorship with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, under the title of "The Literary Absolute". We show that in the accompanying articles of this collected work presenting extracts from the texts of German romanticists it is

possible to find an interpretation of the romantic concept of literature in its connection with the subject, being an alternative to that of Rancière. The ambivalent thesis of Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, according to which the literary Absolute of the romanticists “aggravates and radicalizes the thinking of totality and the Subject. It infinitizes this thinking, and therein, precisely, rests its ambiguity”<sup>40</sup> is interpreted by us drawing on the comment of Daniel J. Hoolsema in the sense that a consistent implementation of a romantic project brings it to such limits where this project changes its meaning for the opposite. As though in art the Subject found its completion simultaneously in the sense that it finally became completed and in that it neared its completion, that is lost its status of the Subject. This thesis putting forward a more nuanced conception of relations between historicity and universality, subjectivization and desubjectivization is associated by us with the idea of representation which, in turn, leads us to the analysis of the role of vision and visibility in the metaphysics of the subject. It is supposed that Nancy questions the subject of representation from within the metaphysics of the Subject, and for that he *looks at* the subject, making him/her visible. Such visibility is provided, first of all, within the territory of art and, in particular, portrait art. In the other four paragraphs of this chapter the four key stages of the development of this topic in Nancy’s works are analyzed.

In **paragraph 4.1.2**, we propose an interpretation of the first significant occurrence of the topic of a subject’s portrait in Nancy’s thought – the chapter called “Larvatus pro Deo” from his “Ego Sum” study related to René Descartes’ “Discourse on the Method”. Nancy, as we try to demonstrate, shows the “groundlessness” of *cogito* and its primordial dependence on the others. It is the attention to the “aesthetic” dimension of Descartes’ text that makes it possible for Nancy to propose a comment to this text of key importance for western philosophy, amplifying the important remarks of Heidegger and Derrida. The typically baroque motives of masks and portraits, on the one hand, allow Descartes

---

<sup>40</sup> The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism Intersections / ed. Ph. Lacoue-Labarthe, J.-L. Nancy. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988. P. 15.

to hide the dependence in question, and on the other – reveal the necessity of presentation of the subject at first to others, and only then, by means of the gaze of these others, to her/himself, so that the subject appears inseparable from this presentation. As though without presentation to others no theory (etymologically connected with the visual sense) of the subject may be possible, the very presentation is performed in a privileged manner in art. A paradox of representation of the subject is formulated: there is no subject without explosion to others; where there is explosion to others, there is no subject. In **paragraph 4.1.3**, Nancy's comment to another key text of West European philosophy of the subject – Hegel's "The Phenomenology of Spirit" – is analyzed. The extract from this work on the end of aesthetic religion is interpreted by Nancy as a portrait of art, the autonomy of which, experiencing its end, is performatively asserted in Hegel's text in the image of a young girl offering gifts. Thus, in the text of the author famous for his thesis on link between painting and subjectivity, Nancy, as we show, tries to break this connection: autonomy of art in his portrait is thought of according to the model distinct from the autonomy of the subject. The gaze of the portrait of art from "The Phenomenology of Spirit" by Hegel as commented on by Nancy is not the gaze of the subject, but a gaze which does not refer to anybody or anything, does not represent anybody or anything, it is a gaze of an exteriorized, drawn outside subjectivity. However we draw attention to that the portrait of art from "The Phenomenology of Spirit" as analyzed by Nancy is not painted, as in the famous thesis on the link between subjectivity and art from Hegel's "Aesthetics", but graphical. In **paragraph 4.1.4**, an attempt is made to interpret a later text by Nancy specially devoted to the topic of a portrait – "The look of the Portrait", as putting together the Nancy's comment on the portrait of art from "The Phenomenology of Spirit" with Hegel's thesis on the link between painting and subject from "Aesthetics". From our perspective, in this text, Nancy seeks to demonstrate to what extent the so-called "autonomous portrait", a portrait *par excellence*, not so much represents, but presents the subject, actually producing the subject on its surface. Nevertheless, as far as the autonomy of the portrait, as

shown above, is thought of along the lines of a model distinct from the autonomy of the subject, being an autonomy of the exterior, production of the subject by the portrait also appears as completion of the metaphysics of the Subject of representation, demonstrating her/his dependence on the others. At that, as we show in **paragraph 4.1.5**, drawing on the text of “The Other Portrait”, such model of an autonomous portrait appears already overcome for Nancy in more contemporary practices of a portrait in which we deal not so much with the portrait of a subject, as with the portrait of the other, and not so much with its presence, as with its withdrawal. The portrait which, as we tried to show, was the place of transition from metaphysics of the Subject to the ontology of the singular plural thus makes transition itself. In the **conclusions** to this chapter, we summarize this oscillating movement of Nancy’s thought from one model of the portrait (as the portrait of the subject) to another (as the portrait of the other), from the completion of the Subject to the ontology of the singular plural.

In the **intermediate conclusion to part II**, we sum up the analysis of the role of the topic of subjects’ visibility in the works by Rancière and Nancy in the “overcoming” of the post-structuralism, and also consider the resources of the thought of the authors of French phenomenology - Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which the two contemporary authors use in so doing.

The general **conclusion** presents the results we obtained. First of all, we draw the conclusions on the topic as a whole: in our study we, managed to show how the topic of visibility of subjects ousts the transparency of reflective consciousness. Secondly, we identified some of its constants (challenges related to theorizing of the two aspects of the subject - activity/passivity and of the heterogeneity of the visible), invariant within the approaches of different authors, and we also tracked a number of tendencies (from being-subject through becoming-subject to completing-subject, from the binary opposition I/the Other to the shared otherness, from intellectual vision to the sensual one, and from it - to the vision oscillating between the sensible and the intellectual, between the image and the text). Thirdly, we outline the results concerning each of the considered authors

relating them with one another. The authors are presented as the key ones for the topic development, mapping in pairs its scope (Sartre contrasts favorably with Merleau-Ponty, Rancière – with Nancy, but it should also be noted that Rancière borrows some solutions from Sartre, transforming them, and Nancy benefits from those of Merleau-Ponty). Finally, we sketch the ways for the further study of the topic associating it with a more attentive and close reading of some texts of the authors spontaneously not associated with it work, but susceptible, according to our assumption, to a more nuanced interpretation, similar to that we proposed in our chapter 1 on Sartre.

**Author's publications on the topic of the thesis study**

1. *Pertseva. A.A.* Jacques Rancière: Philosopher and his Subject // *Philosophy. Language. Culture.* Vol. 6. 2015. P. 477-491.
2. *Pertseva A.A.* Appearance, Politics, Subjectivation: from Foucault to Rancière // *The Philosophy Journal.* 2015. Vol. 8. N. 3. P. 121–143.
3. *Pertseva A.A.* Visibility of the Subject Between Imagination and Perception. Sartre and Merleau-Ponty // *The Philosophy Journal.* 2016. Vol. 9. N. 3. P. 77–105.
4. *Pertseva A.A.* Historicism and Subjectiv(iz)ation: from Foucault to Rancière and Backwards // *History of philosophy.* 2017. Vol. 22. N. 1. P. 92-105.
5. *Pertseva A.A.* Image of the Other in Merleau-Ponty's Early Theory of Imagination // *The Philosophy Journal.* 2017. Vol. 10. N. 1. P. 116–135.
6. *Pertseva, A.* Le Regard de l'Autre chez Sartre: L'Entre-Deux de L'Imagination et de la Perception // *Bulletin d'Analyse Phénoménologique.* 2017. Vol. 13. N. 2. P. 413-432.
7. *Pertseva A.A.* Sit and Watch // *LOGOS. Philosophical and Literary Journal.* Vol. 28. N. 2. 2018. P. 269-273.