



## Introduction

Doubting the reader, or rather the reading in itself, intuitively seems like it would diminish the written work and obfuscate the writer's primary intent. The sole statement of all readings being mis-readings, partial, imposed or imagined readings, surely suggests an ineluctable disconnect between the author and their target audience, where the latter disfigures or completely abandons the symbollic value of the original work. However the initial statement continues with the suggestion of the text not simply residing there, in its base form, and that it itself is just as fallen apart as the world itself. Intuitively, this could devalue the work entirely, as it's primary value and the weight, with which it was written, can be said to not exist within the decentralized (fallen apart) text, which can also not be fully read with its original connotations intact. However this decentralization is said to exist in the entire "world" - not only its texts, but its language, people, cultures and truth. And should we acknowledge Haraway's idea of any text already being enmeshed in the world's practices, we can develop a mode of thinking, which not only affirms this falling apart, but also inscribes meaning back into the world, and the mis-readings of written works that can never truly simply exist. In this essay I will show exactly why the reader always seems removed from the text, and with that the removal of man from simple existence. But through the implications of our consciousness, I wish to also show how this raises no cause for alarm, for decentralized existence calls for the application of reason through the symbollic. This method of thought brings new light to the original quote by Haraway, as the suggested meshing bears not only relativistic implications, but also uncovers a strange position we hold in the universe. I will begin with Descartes' first implication of something, which bears strong implications in regards to the initial quote, and then walk through methods of linguistics and epistemology which seem to not only compliment the quote, but also raise new questions and suggestions.

## Descartes' insanity

Firstly, I would like to put focus on Descartes who, through his methodic doubt, implied our symbollic removal from the "truth", yet discarded his implications almost sooner than they had arised (possibly because of his limited understanding of the area he had began to operate in). Following the skeptic tradition of the enlightenment, Descartes meditated on the nature of his reality through a cyclical method: in his understanding of the world around him and his role in it, he set out to find at least one reason, which could call for doubt. Should he find a thing to not be induitable, it would fall and be deemed as untrue. And should some induitable part of his object of thought still persist after this crushing wave of doubt, he would repeat the cycle by again finding some doubtability in it. His objective was of course to find the induitable, an absolute truth, a constant, which could not be undermined. He succeeded and his success is summed up in his quote, *dubito ergo cogito, cogito ergo sum*, but I wish not to discuss the nature of reason; Instead, I wish to stop at an earlier pint of his meditations. As Descartes sat by his fireplace, he observed his own hand and was absolutely certain of his existence. But might he be dreaming? Initially, he discarded this thought, saying that he cannot remember a dream so realistic and detailed. Then again he realized, that he cannot say with certainty that he is awake, regardless of how true to life this dream may seem, for when dreaming, he can never know he is not awake, until he actually wakes. This topples the legitimacy of all his sensory data and the empirical world may not even exist in his perpetual state of dreaming. He would then go on to compare dreams with paintings, thus finding induitability in the base logic of the universe (before inevitably doubting and toppling this as well), but before doing so, Descartes makes an off handed remark with great implications. He says that similarly to dreams, insane men can similarly not discern the true world from their hallucinations, yet that in comparing himself with such people, he would be no less insane than them. It is not his disregard of the empiric I wish to focus on (saying that the "text is never simply there" due to the fallibility of the

empiric world seems naive), but this mention of the insane and their apparent disconnect from the true world. Before continuing, it is important to discuss Saussure's register of thinking, where he defines language as a synthesis of signifiers and signifieds. The latter are the ideas themselves (in the case of objects, it is not the object itself, but our idea of the object - more on that later), and the signifieds are the symbolic representations of ideas - words. Language arises from our "creation" of being, by describing the world around us with signifiers, which bear symbolic weight and thus bring the world into consciousness for us. It is then not surprising to see, why Wittgenstein described objective knowledge or truth not as something which cannot be doubted (as Descartes would have it), but as something which *should* not be doubted. For not entering into language, into the reality, which, through signifiers attached to otherwise indescribable ideas, can breed only psychosis and thus insanity. Descartes then does not describe the insane as those, who perceive the world through hallucinations, as a dramer does, but as those, who remove themselves from the world of signifiers, of the symbols which we have created to understand the world. Two paths open: either this means, that such an individual can no longer make sense of the world and its truth, or perhaps that he has removed the shroud that the culture of man had placed upon him, and he can gaze into the truth without a mediator (in the form of signifiers). This method of thinking is the first link to Haraway's quote, as the text is implied to not simply "be" there; it is not an object which exists in itself and with its own discernible being, but rather a mode of connection between what we can fathom and the world around us. Should the insane be able to remove themselves from this world of language, it must mean that the signifiers do not bear an objective link to only certain parts of the "true" world, but rather that the acceptance and understanding of language as a signifier is subjective - the words do not live on the page, as they are merely symbols for being; no reading is done in the same method as the writing was, for every individual seems to be intertwined with the world of signifiers in different ways and on different levels.

### **The center does not hold**

We must then of course turn our thought towards this link between the signified and the signifiers, for it seems that implications of this method lay not only in texts, but that they reach for our reality itself. It is here, that Lacan's philosophy on the imaginary and symbolic (a term which I have already used) comes into play. Lacan proposes a tripartite structure for man's interaction with reality (which bears many psychoanalytic implications, but it is not meant to replace Freud's tripartite structural model of the human psyche for instance, as it is simply a different register of thinking): the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. The imaginary (the name not coming from the word "imagination", but rather "image") is the world of signifieds; we enter into the imaginary through our mirror stage, when the child successfully removes its thought from the world around him and begins to understand the latter as such. It is the root of dialectic, for man can empirically compare himself with others and judge accordingly. But this imaginary world bears no meaning, should it not be for the symbolic. The symbolic is the representation of imaginary ideas, the signifiers, which we do not create ourselves, but rather step into, just as we step into language (this thought will arise in this essay once more). The symbolic lives within us and it inscribes meaning to the imaginary; it is our mode of understanding the world. What we are left with is the real, a "truth" which we cannot recognize, for, according to Heidegger, to define something we must always have something to contrast it with, and should we have the symbolic, the real is all that which cannot be symbolized. It is thus, by definition, unrecognizable to us. We cannot grasp the real, but we can understand symbolism, which then means that our relative understanding of the world comes not from some indubitable point, but from the relativistic inscribing of symbolic meanings to concrete ideas. Haraway compares text - words, language - to the world itself and if we do the same after implying different levels and ways of integration into language, we can easily say that each individual

symbolically understands the world in different ways. It is not only the language with which the text was written itself that creates an impossibility for an absolute mode of reading, but our sheer understanding of the world, which we symbolise and thus understand differently.

It is important to note that this does not imply some extreme form of relativism. I have already noted that the symbolic is a web of representations that we do not create by ourselves, for ourselves, but rather step (or integrate) into. From the moment in a person's childhood, when he can no longer feel his mother beside him, he is overcome with desire. This original desire is the desire for the mother - the child has now grasped the symbolic meaning of presence and absence (and it wishes for the former). Our desires only grow from there, but they can never be satisfied, for we can never reach the "real" component of what we desire. Thus we integrate ourselves into the symbolic, a sort of relief for the obtaining of our objects of desire. But again, such symbolism is not fully relativistic. Our desires tend to be narrated by our culture and just the same, the symbolism that surrounds us as well. Foucault suggests a complete decentralization of the truth, which can be better understood if looked at through Lacan's symbolism. According to Foucault, there is no such thing as a sovereign within a nation; instead, all men simply act as they should act within their environment. The wealthy do not suppress the poor because of their perverted nature of evil intentions, but instead simply behave as individuals of their rank generally behave. The same can be said for other areas, such as science and the individual's psyche - nothing is absolute and centralized and the "being" of everything lies in the relation of all things to all other things. The nature of reality lives in discourse; everything IS relative, for its existence can only be defined with its relation to all else, yet at the same time, this creates a symbolic "mainstream" - the being of everything is relative, but just as the wealthy, the relativity between all is already defined within a culture, which follows this symbolism purely because of its existence. This can perhaps be understood through Hegel's dialectic. Immediate knowledge is that, which requires no mediator to intuitively be understood. It is abstract in the sense that it has no defining components, only our immediate understanding (for instance, the understanding that I am sitting by a fireplace and observing my own hand). But to truly define this being, we must delve into the dialectic method of the negatives, which seeks to uncover the true being of something by contrasting something with its other (or the "not-something"). But quickly we can assure ourselves of how this, too, supports Foucault's idea of decentralized truth, for "something" is "something" only in relation to its "other" - but the "other" is for itself "something" and what is to us "something" is for that thing its "other". The only way to thus concretize the being of some object, is to observe the dialectic method itself and thus grasp the relativity (or rather dependence) of the elements of our reality.

## **Discursive reality**

But how exactly does this relate to the quote at hand? I have already touched upon the implications of Lacan's philosophy for the understanding of written texts. While it is true that as stated, we do not invent the symbolic, but merely step into the web which we are presented with, it still holds that it is our own duty to interpret the symbolic. If we take into account the nature of *being* as decentralized and described to our cognition through non-objective symbolism, the reading of a text is necessarily always also an interpretation. The words which the author uses bear a specific meaning (and associations) to his cognition and they are based on objects, which exist only in reciprocity with all else. The reader will bring the work into consciousness through symbolism of his own and place this symbolism in relation to the world around *them*.

But this thought can also have destructive consequences. Language bases itself in reciprocity; it itself has no inert being and it thus cannot be said to absolutely exist. It only exists because of its speakers, but the speakers can only speak the language, if they imagine its existence (or maybe the

existence of a perfect speaker - who also does not exist). We can then follow Haraway's comparison of the text to the world, or even Foucault's decentralization of truth, to arrive at the conclusion, that not only does the being of all existence rely on the existence of all else, but that the existence itself is nothing inert - a cup is not a cup because it is not a car or a tree or anything other than a cup in all its features; the cup does not even exist outside of imagining its existence. The being of this certain cup lies in its relation to the world around it, but just as it itself is "beingless", so is the world around it, existing only because we have purported it to exist. And our imagining, our definition of the world as such, can only be done through the symbolic. Here we come back around, with the thought that we cannot base the symbolic in anything "real" (remember, the real is the unsymbolized) and thus invent it only with the imagination of its existence (even though the world of the symbolic cannot be without our cognition). How can the world function as such? It seems as if the reciprocity of all things should not allow existence, as nothing truly is without our cognition, and we cannot bring into consciousness that, which isn't (coincidentally, the impossibility of inventing new colors to paint with, was Descartes' method of realizing that even though his sensory data could be deceitful, universal logic still exists - for a while); to make matters worse, our connection with the imaginary can only be achieved through discourse (by application of symbolic signifiers), the existence (or rather, being) of which presents the same polemic. This discursiveness of reality perhaps calls for the inversion of our object, and instead of focusing on discursive reality, we should focus on the reality of discourse. As the world is built through discourse (be it via the method of Lacan's epistemology or Foucault's decentralized society), we must inspect the discourse itself in order to understand our connection with the world (and indeed, the texts which we read). In a way, this is what I have been doing throughout this essay, however impartiality seems impossible, due to the nature of our connection with the world and the reciprocity of the world itself. We would first need to step away from the symbolic towards the real - a task impossible by definition and a notion so ludicrous, even Descartes condemned the insanity which arises from such psychological processes.

The metaphysical complications which arise bluntly offer another option. Although Saussure's split between signifiers and signifieds might hold true, it is important to note that the signifieds, the ideas themselves, hold nothing inert which would call for a specific signifier to be appointed to them. The world of linguistics is thus fully artificial and superficial; this means, that there is always a possibility of such theories, as those presented in this essay, to not be true philosophical proof, but merely proof of grammatical rules. When we try to use language to propose theories about our universe, we do not need to stay true to the universal, natural logic (if such a thing exists!); even if it might seem we respect the logical and reasonable boundaries of the world, we might simply be obeying the grammatical structure of the language we are speaking, while falsely believing we are observing the structure of reality itself. This critique may be applicable to a wide range of philosophical thought (and it initially served as a critique of Descartes), but it is especially relevant in this essay, where I have pondered on the discursiveness of reality and the reciprocal implications of language as a mediator between or cognition and reality. It is difficult to discern legitimate conclusions from grammatical "games", and if such is the nature of our universe, it can be frightening to say that we cannot perscribe reality to the texts we read, much less to anything else.

## **Kant saves the universe**

Kant's epistemology has the potential to both endow us with the necessity of reason, regardless of the chaotic world where insanity might seem like the only escape, and bring further meaning into the initial quote by Haraway. Kant's "narrative story" brings together elements of both empirical and rational philosophies. In his method of thinking, empirical data is of utmost importance, as reason alone can not produce the world (for emotions and symbolism without objects to mirror itself on

to, are empty and meaningless) which exists exactly to be rationalized in man's cognition. But empirical data without emotional (or symbolic!) input is of no use, as it tells us nothing; it is empty sensory data without value. The synthesis of this empirical data - the signified - and man's valued experience of this world - the signifiers - is exactly what produces reality. I have debated on the decentralized nature of reality and the truth, the reciprocity of all existence and man's symbollic detachment from the real, so it might not seem intuitive to even use the term "reality". But the subjectivity of experience is of utmost importance here. It is clear that the universe can be experienced as one thing, or as another completely, depending on the viewpoint from which it is observed (the viewpoint meaning the symbolism and discourse it is observed with). There are exactly as many "realities" as there are viewpoints - infinite. Within each viewpoint, all being is no less reciprocal than implied earlier, yet each viewpoint bears with itself a specific world of symbolism, known only to the individual who has taken up this viewpoint. For an individual, it may not be possible to define a cup without defining all else, but within him is the ability to "produce" the reality of the cup within his own universe, via the synthesis of empirical data and the symbolism within him. This also implies that while the symbolic takes us away from the real, we have the ability of shaping our own symbolic world, or rather, of changing our viewpoint. A rich man might not oppress a poor man due to his perversion and cruelty, but rather due to adhering to the symbolic structure of the culture around him, but it is absolutely in his power (and I say absolutely, due to the fact that the viewpoint of one person cannot be simply reproduced in another) to rip himself away from the symbolism and to try and reshape the dominant method of discourse (as stated before, it is in our power to interpret the symbolic).

After taking into account Kant's epistemology we can very clearly see why all readings are mis-readings, re-readings, partial, imposed and imagined readings: because we cannot reproduce reality in the same way as the author or any other readers. Viewpoints are defined by the symbolic value we inscribe to empirical data and due to the reciprocity of the being of all things, as well as language, which serves as our main method of connection with all things, we cannot hope to share our viewpoint with the author. Similarly, the text as a being never *is* simply there, due to both its role as a mediator between us and the imaginary and its reciprocal existence. In a world which is fallen apart, decentralized, everything which is, does not live in itself, but it is rather enmeshed in the world, or rather exists in its relation to the world.

## **Conclusion**

In this essay, I have tried to thoroughly analyze the implications of the original quote, mainly via the paths of linguistics and epistemology. I have tried to encompass the thought of many great philosophers who had contemplated on related topics, and even though the essay might at times hint at seemingly nonsencical metaphysical polemic, it still represents a valuable method of thinking, based in reality and something worth considering not only with relation to written texts, but art and human relations in general.

Based on the contents of this essay, it should come to no surprise, that I suppose two reactions to these thoughts (what should be surprising, is that there are only two). It can either feel terrifyingly lonely to be the only person to ever experience your own symbollic world in any meaningful way, and it can seem frightening that so much of our reality relies on the discourse between beings who do not percieve the world in the same manner. But the other viewpont that can be taken up, is the understanding of power which an individual is imbued with in such a world. I have already mentioned the power of any person, to change the symbolism which binds him to the world (for instance solely by learning a language, the structure of the mind and its thoughts will change drastically). Thus determinism can be discarded quite quickly, as (in a world with no inert being, no

less!) the subject can, albeit only through the path of knowledge and dedication, interpret and experience the world in any manner which he can rationalize. Even written works do not lose their meaning in such a way, even though no reading can read the text as it was written - the text is now merely a suggestion of being, waiting to be brought into reality via any of the infinite viewpoints available to man.