

29th Lecture at the Gramsci Monument, The Bronx, NYC: 29th July 2013

WHAT IS REALITY?

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Reality is a promise of consistency which is not kept. Here, I am using 'reality' to refer to everything which we assume has a certain consistency, whereby a certain consistency means a certain stability. Reality is synonymous with the space of facts, called the *symbolic order* by Lacan, the space of language, logos, and meaning pervaded by the imaginary. I am calling the universe of discursive facts and established consistencies 'the space of facts', i.e., all those things whose existence one can confidently assert. The space of facts is the space of existing things. These may be objects, such as a chair or computer, but may equally well represent ideas, opinions, hopes and suppositions. Facts also include non-material things which can be found as existent in the space of facts, and circulate in it as memories, certainties, dreams or fantasies and are thus constitutive of our reality. Reality is the space of facts populated by the most diverse things that are subject to factual codifications. Even if these codifications are contingent, they exist in the mode of ontological efficiency.

Reality is stratified, but its layers often overlap beyond recognition. Since the phenomena in the space of reality are codified as cultural, economic, historical, religious, social, political, scientific etc., reality is the dimension of discursive codifications. As a codified milieu of consistency, reality is overdetermined and overcomplex. The subject moves in this sphere of overdetermination and overcomplexity guided by constituted structures providing an orientation for thought and agency. And yet there are moments of critical disorientation. In those moments, the subject experiences the inconsistency of the contingent weft and warp of consistency, which is its reality. In the subject's experience of reality, existence and contingency are connected: *What exists does not necessarily have to exist as it is.*¹

The subject is the agency of this experience. The subject is neither a self-transparent *ego cogito* nor a self-consciousness resting in itself, an auto-affect untouched by hetero-affects. Instead, the subject is the scene of self-mediation with its object elements marking its status in the world of facts. Subject and objects elements intersect in the subject. There is no reason to reduce it to only one of these elements. The subject's complexity inherently includes the impossibility of reduction to either a

subject or object status. The subject oscillates from here to there. While the subject thinks its object being, it is already, as a thinking object, a subject. And yet by opening up its object being as a subject, it is also thinking its own borders as a subject. A subject is what thinks as an object and, by conceiving of itself in this way, reveals its own being as a subject. This does not mean that the subject would be sheer thought, intellectual intuition, pure reason. This does not mean that it would be in possession of itself, identical with itself and founded in a substantial being-for-itself.² The subject is not a self that can be certain of itself as it is of a given. It is the scene of a self-experience which proves to be an experience of inconsistency to the extent that it experiences the lack of self as a condition for the possibility of itself.

What I call the subject stretches into the depths of an insubstantiality, which proves to be the transcendental form of the subject. The subject delineates the scene of an elemental emptiness and, in relation to it, every ontic-empirical subject experiences its reification – as if life means asserting one's singularity in the desert of a threatening universality in the certainty that this self-assertion never reaches a conclusion. The subject as a stage is not a subject *of* the stage, at least not primarily. One is familiar with the classic empirical subject, at times a colourful protagonist, at times a battered one, moving across the stage of the theatre of its being, which is its life. Since this is a central subject, the point where all possible narratives meet, the subject gains a coherence, foundation, and finality. Thus, the subject orders the world according to its own standards, becoming the model of that ontological facilitating agency which is the transcendental subject.

1 This is why Nancy can speak of the “necessity [...] of thinking the absence of any metaphysical necessity”. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Adoration: The Deconstruction of Christianity II*, (trans. John McKeane), Fordham University Press 2013, p. 17.

2 Nancy wrote: “The self is what does not possess itself and does not retain itself, and is, all told, what has its “itself” in this very same “not” itself: nonsubsistence, nonsubstance, upsurge, subject”. See: Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hegel. The Restlessness of the Negative*, (trans. J. Smith and S. Miller) University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p. 36.