

Modern Postmodernity and Discursive Power: Part I

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The essay is designed to investigate the foundations of the conjunction of modern/postmodern premises that the world is a construct of discourses and their power. Such premises require the exclusion of the world of perception, including the lived world, and the appearance of the modern subject and its specific interpretation of reality. The question is as follows: how must the modern subject access such reality when it is assumed that such reality is not accessible to direct, perceptual intuition? Here we encounter the way how the subject must construct methodological and theoretical discourses which do not represent, but ‘make’ modern reality.

Keywords: power, discourse, subject, method, possibility, projection

INTRODUCTION

For postmodernity the term ‘culture’ is all encompassing; it includes lyric poetry, art of war and divine miracles. All things and events have a meaning due to culture and culture determines how we think and act. The numerous designations about culture are endless: there is multi-culturalism, discursive powers, post-colonial consciousness and political correctness, there are pop and popular cultures, television discourses, and even corporate and military cultures. Cultures are different, and each is in a position to legitimate individual claims as equivalent to others. Cultures have no external criteria to judge their adequacies as to their representative capacity of the world. Each is a world in itself and can only be seen as different from others. All legitimating grounds are dead – death of subject, poetry, philosophy, identity, text, essence, all the gods and due to biological technology, death of death. No attention is directed toward the irreconcilable contradictions, appearing in such notions as ‘post-truth’, ‘post-democracy’ or even ‘post-communication’. Somehow the ‘post-communication’ advocates manage to communicate about their nonsensical pronouncements.

The issue which is neglected by the numerous post-modernisms, is not specific to any post-modern writer, but is common to all. They all assume modern phenomena which, while not officially articulated, are present in cultural texts and even practices. Such phenomena in postmodernity show up as modern conceptions without which postmodernity would make no sense. This is to say the understanding of cultures as discourses belongs to and is comprehensible as various disciplines that have a modern logic. There is a general presumption that cultural texts – from rituals through scientific theories – are either social

constructs or independent constructs that do not represent any reality but comprise a variety of hermeneutical, interpretive discourses. There is no need to contest this consensus. Our task is to show how such constructivism of discourses is based on more pervasive awareness that provides the grounding of postmodern claims that all discourses are power laden constructs.

Diverse writers of post-modern tradition, including semioticians such as R. Barthes (1977), have located the phenomenon of power in discourses, including the stars of Enlightenment, the modern sciences and their theories. We shall follow two basic modes of awareness which belong to phenomenological philosophy under the basic notion 'intentionality' that provide the conditions for the possibility of postmodern claims to multi discursivity and linguistic power. To articulate these claims it is necessary to show the arguments by modern philosophers and scientists that excluded a direct access to the perceptual qualities of objects and events of the world. Such exclusion results in the postulation of the priority of the formal, linguistic and logical constructs as the bases of scientific practice and philosophical thought. It is no surprise that the result is a conception of a theory and a method used by a will to master the material world. Perhaps without intending, the modern thinkers performed a specific 'bracketing' that allowed the attribution of power primarily to linguistic articulations of all phenomena. The result of this development is manifested in the current claims by the semioticians, hermeneuticists, natural language advocates and even the deconstructionists that language or discourse is the primary power in all domains of human experience and praxis. Although such claims might seem overstated, they will be more than justified by the subsequent analyses of the basis of modern philosophy, specifically its ontology and its formal metaphysical theory and method.

In this essay we shall trace the mentioned 'bracketing' and show what phenomena become discarded and what phenomena remain in order to be constitutive of power. The result of this investigation will disclose specific formations which comprise the most fundamental modalities of our modern awareness. The term 'awareness' consists of specific practices ruled and formed by a set of modern ontological principles and formal – specifically quantitative languages. In addition, such practices assume tacitly a power over a specific form of 'transcendence' lending such practices their freedom. The latter shows up in numerous ways across various socio-political, economic and scientific formations, aims and imageries, lending an appearance of complete arbitrariness to such practices at all levels. The term 'practices' includes what the human actually does in his various relationships to the world of objects and events of whatever type, including cultural events.

OBJECTIVE WORLD

The emergence of modern understanding of discursive power rests on a unique construction of what is considered to be objectively 'given' to awareness, and the given is regarded as 'transcendence', inaccessible to and beyond direct perception. The structure of the given requires a deformation of qualitative awareness, its exclusion from the domain of objective reality and hence its reduction to the 'internal' states of the subject. Such states are subsequently designated in terms of psychology and physiology. Such a form of bracketing can be called the Cartesian skepticism. As has been shown in numerous works, the modern revolution regards reality to be a material extension of the sum of atomic parts that are not accessible to perception, although manageable by a method of quantitative – mathematical manipulation (Mickunas 1983). Following this, the entire modern view is borne by a prejudgment

that what is beyond doubt is a construction of a precise method capable of ‘univocal, universal, impartial, and objective’ access to the atomistic magnitudes composing ‘reality’. It is presumed that the latter consists equally of an univocal, universal and impartial or mechanical rationality correlative to the precise structure of quantitative methodology. There is a need to show the ways in which both, the methodology and the ‘reality’ are constructed, correlated and assumed to be isomorphic. For modern sciences and current philosophies, according to Husserl, mathematical or quantitative discourses are not only methodological, but founding for all theoretical thought (Husserl 1962). The specific composition of such discourses suggests that no intuitive, that is perceptual content, can be correlated to them. They contain structures and rules which can be formulated without any relation to perceptual qualities. Such qualities also include traditional categories which separate things into ‘essences.’ The latter require qualitative intuition which, for modern ontology and method, is no longer available. This excludes the entire domain of direct awareness. Moreover, any concrete function or use such structures acquire is not dictated by these structures. Thus, mathematical discourse, presumed to be *lingua universalis* of all understanding, does not prescribe any mode or manner as to how such a lingua is to be correlated or applied to the perceived and, above all, conceived world as material. In other words, the function is a matter of will, but in such a way that neither the atomic reality nor the quantitative methodology can compel the will; they have no causal force. The will functions purely autonomously. The implications of such functioning will be analysed subsequently.

In order for these mathematical discursive structures to acquire any validity, the ‘objective’ world must be posited in accordance with the requirements of these discourses. First, the discourses are indifferent with respect to perceptual, qualitative and essential awareness; they treat all events as if they were essentially homogeneous. Second, the perceptual domain of intuition, directly present to live awareness, is disregarded and thus transcended in favour of posited atomic or material parts, i.e. posited in accordance with the requirements of scientific discourses. This transcendence assumes at least two features: first, it is required that any awareness must transcend the qualitative sphere, regarded essentially as subjective and psychological, to be ‘overlooked’ and disregarded, and second, the transcendence – beyond perception – of the posited homogeneous world subtending and explaining the qualitative. Thus, awareness has no access to the second transcendence apart from the theoretical and discursive quantitative methodology. This is the source of the conception of mathematically idealised nature whereby nature becomes a homogeneous mathematical manifold. We must be careful with the concept of homogeneity, since the latter might seem to have geometric associations, and hence capable of being given in perceptual intuition. Modern sciences resolve this problem by discursive practices which translate geometric formations into a mathematical set of signs which do not offer any semblance or intuitive comparison to the geometric domain.

The geometric understanding of the environment, given in direct qualitative awareness, would still offer a field posited as material shapes, yet with mathematisation of geometry, and the formalisation of mathematics, one can regard the geometric world as quanta, as numerical points, sums and divisions, arranged with the precise structures of formal discourses. Irrespective of the levels of quantitative-formal constitution, there is posited only one fundamental-transcendent reality – that of magnitudes. The problematic both for the discursive domain and the transcendent domain lead to a particular contradiction which cannot be solved within the limits of the framework of scientific discourses. The scientific, formal

discourse is proclaimed to be universal, all-inclusive, and thus able to subsume all phenomena, including the subjective reduced to cause and effect, 'objectively'. And this is the issue: the subject who calculates, formalises must be either subsumed under the discourse, or be the condition for the constitution of the discourse. If the former assumption is accepted, then the discourse must assume a position of supremacy over the subject, i.e. be objective; yet this very discourse can have only one kind of 'reality', homogeneous material magnitudes. The discourse is not 'matter' but 'ideality' and indeed a necessary ideality. And yet, if the latter is taken for granted, i.e. that the subject is also to be submitted under the discourse, then the ideality of the discourse has no 'place' in the subject, since the subject must be contingent and thus cannot be a basis for the mathematical discourse and formal necessities. Such a subject becomes equally contingent.

In either case, the formal, discursive compositions are something other than the posited transcendent reality of magnitudes, and the latter is not given to perception. In fact, the morphological environment of a directly given world, a world of shapes, pathways axes for practical activity and multi-leveled interconnections is regarded as complex phenomena that are not identical with the strict homogeneous reality of magnitudes. This non-identity precludes the possibility of deriving the formal discursive formations from the phenomenal-morphological composition of what E. Husserl called the lived world (Husserl 1962). As a result, the former are neither correlative to the intuited world of morphologically composed things and their interconnections, inclusive of the 'real' subject, nor they are obtainable from the posited homogeneous world (Stroeker 1987). On these terms, the transcendent world, the world of theoretical objectivity, is not given and cannot be a source of scientific discursive compositions, as if available from generalisation of qualitative features of experienced things. The strict point is this: the morphological world of perception is *given*, and yet it cannot be a source for the understanding of the world of extended magnitudes; thus, neither can account for the discursive methods of the modern sciences and the positing of the world of transcendent and perceptually inaccessible homogeneous, atomistic world regarded as magnitudes. And yet, the discursive mathematical and formal compositions of sciences are regarded as *given*, and indeed with full evidential necessity. For scientists and analytic philosophers, such necessity is more certain than the 'empirical' data available in research labs. What kind of necessity? Purely quantitative and formal constructs, having their own rules and procedures, where the morphological or the 'material' side is completely contingent and arbitrary. With respect to the rules of the formal domain, the morphological and intuitive world of shapes, sizes and relationships is subjective, arbitrarily, contingent and changeable. This is one of the more fundamental and initial designations of the formal as necessary and the perceptual, and even the 'material', as 'arbitrary and contingent.' This suggests that the connection between them is not direct, not immediate or *given*, but must be constructed by discourses different from them. While it is possible to posit perceptual acts, and even motives, that can constitute this connection, such as interest (Dallmayr 1974), they are excluded a priori. There must be, therefore, a specific discourse that has to be deciphered in its own right. This discourse must account for the relationship of two radically distinct domains: the theoretical-methodological (mathematical and formal) discourses and the discourse concerning the transcendent, contingent domain of matter. To repeat, the former is regarded as necessary and *given*, while the latter is regarded as transcendent, material and contingent, although *not given* to any perception. Resultantly, all discourses must be 'constructs' of the subject who does not exist in the 'objective world', or, by extension, constructs

of cultures as a domain of symbolic designs wherein the symbols do not designate or represent any reality. In this sense, the notion of *lingua universalis* becomes redundant, empty and formal, without any content, since it cannot lay claim to represent reality as it is. Any discourse can function as long as it is applicable to construct material parts in accordance with the requirements of such a discourse. In principle, one is left with a notion of construction both of discourses and the material world.

SUBJECT AND WILL

It should be no surprise that modern age was framed as one of 'will and idea', with an added motive as 'will to power'. Such claims are possible when the scientific discourses, or termed otherwise, the quantitative-formal discourses, are not within the 'objective domains' of the contingent world, posited as transcendent. They are not found even in the directly intuited morphological composition of the lived world. They must be regarded as different from these domains. Not having any other place for the formal, the thinkers of the modern age had to invent a container, different from the 'material space', called 'mind' in which these quantitative and formal discourses are either found or constructed. These discourses are in the mind. The interiority of this mind assumes an ambiguous status: it is the container of the formal discourses, regarded as necessary, and yet it is factually a contingent subject. This contingency is expressed in Cartesian logic as follows: the formal structures in human mind, with respect to assumed absolute being, cannot be regarded as necessary. This is to say, the absolute being can will different formal systems; this is an analogical expression of a conception which offers an initial indication as to the arbitrariness of the formal. In this sense, the formal domain swings in the ambiguity between necessity and will, constructed rules and choice. The importance of this ambiguity consists precisely in the option to either regard the formal discourses as a priori given or as a construct of the subject. Various debates are offered at the dawn of the modern age to indicate the shift toward the latter option. The notions of nature as created in accordance with mathematical laws comprise one such expression (Schabert 1978). When this notion is coupled with the view that even the mathematical-formal domain is subject to a decision by the will, then the result is obvious: the emphasis is on the primacy of subjective construction of the formal systems. They are also chosen, although they cannot be regarded as contingent in the sense of the contingency of the material world. Their emergence requires unique 'subjective' activities that must be capable of formal construction and of arbitrary signification. Moreover, such intentions must include the possibility of extending and proliferating formal constructions and divisions at will by disregarding the perceptual, intuitive content. In short, the formal domain in the mind are empty, metaphysical constructs detached from the lived world, although they have assumed a complete dominance of all sciences. If phenomena are not quantified, then they are not scientific.

If we pay attention to this disregard, we shall gain a clearer understanding of the constructive intentionality, necessary for the composition of power in the modern age at the level of discourses, and the postmodern conception that all discourses are power laden. To note, while the conception of homogeneity of the transcendent reality of magnitudes can be described by geometrical structures, corresponding to the morphological and perceptually intuited world, the shift from the geometrical signification to the mathematical and formal discourses abandons any kind of intuitive correspondence between the shapes of geometry

and the morphological compositions of the lived world. This means that any theory of representative correspondence, or correspondence theory of logic and reality, as if the former were a copy of the world in the 'mind' has to be abandoned. The signitive discourses as quantitative and formal do not offer any intuitive counterpart in the perceptual world apart from the sounds or marks, selected arbitrarily. But these marks, while part of the morphological world, in no wise resemble the formal discourses as the condition for construction of theories and methods; they simply provide the arbitrary means for perceptual expression. While there are many complexities in the construction of the quantitative-formal discourses of theoretical-methodological 'thought', in principle this thought does not offer any possibility of correspondence between such discourses and the perceptual world of shapes and structures. The operations with formal, as signitive discourses, offer themselves in a precise order: they must be arranged sequentially and uni-directionally (Stroeker 1987). They must follow a temporal sequence and must be constructed as sequential.

In phenomenological terms, there appears a specific absence on the basis of the transformation from the morphological lived world, present to perceptual awareness, to the formal-quantitative signitive discourses, expressed serially by arbitrarily selected marks: $a+b+c+d\dots$. In our daily awareness, it is obvious that the intentional direction toward the perceptual world, explicating its morphological constitution, can be designated as *vertical*. The maintenance of the vertical intentionality requires the presence and continuity of the directly intuited morphology: 'I am looking at a pattern of objects.' This intuition can be unfolded in the form of a horizon, and if need be in horizontal performances composed of grammatically structured marks or sounds. Looking at... a 'pattern' can extend toward the inclusion of increasing variety of things. Thus the morphological awareness of a particular object – a 'pattern' can offer a possibility of eidetic variation to yield a pure geometric figure, whereby the morphological awareness becomes an intuitive exemplification of a corresponding eidetic structure such that the things, which the pattern contains, can become redundant. Each morphological variant has a representing capacity, i.e. it can give an intuitive similarity to the eidetic structure, held by vertical intentionality. Yet the constitution of the mathematical-formal need no longer signifies the object present to vertical intentionality. It becomes free from any morphological grounds and vertical intentionality and can be explicated on the basis of its formal procedures horizontally. This is to say, it can 'progress' uni-directionally in a process of either increased formally analytic differentiations or even an indefinite repetition of functions.

The essence of this horizontal process, as a sequence of arbitrary marks, shows that the criteria of articulation, differentiation and analyses are intrinsic to the formal discourses, without reference to anything in a lived world. This is quite fitting, since the criteria of the experienced world, the given morphological structures, are no longer signified by the formal discourses. This means that what the formal discourses signify are their own arbitrary selection of means of expression. The formal can be still regarded as 'necessary' and the selected expressive 'material' as contingent (although with the previously mentioned ambiguity), yet what leads the formal process is the possibility of increased formalisation of propositions. The outcome is a concept of formal discourses which can be differentiated into formal sub-discourses, or splitting up of discourses into distinct and independent formal discourses. By excluding the morphological composition of the lived world, this process pretends to subsume under itself all domains of the world not on the basis of any intuitive content but on the basis of formal designations and differentiations.

CONTINGENCY

The above discussed problems of the transcendent world of atomic universe appears here in a new guise. The excluded morphological lived world yields, in accordance with formal discourses, no visible necessity. The posited homogeneous world, transcending all perceptual and intuitive access in the lived world, does not offer any viable view which would make its necessity present. This is to say, it must be also regarded as contingent. The only option left is that it must be posited in accordance with the formal definitions and procedures whose necessity would provide a *model, or even changing models* of explanation not for the perceptual components, but for *possible processes designated as material*. The contingent atomistic world of magnitudes obtains its necessity from another, and in two senses. First, from the formal discourses comprising the theoretical-methodological domain presumed to be correlative to the posited transcendent reality, and second, from a presumed act of an absolute creation (Galileo) such that the scientific theoretical-methodological composition is the very way in which reality is created (Schabert 1978). This is the theological support designated to lend the functioning of this reality some necessity and to guarantee that our scientific formal discourses and calculations are sufficiently adequate descriptions of this material reality. Thus the Galilean exclamation of our 'greatness' (Schabert 1978). Analogous symbolic ploy was used by Descartes to guarantee the necessity of the objective phenomena. This persistent insistence on securing theological assurances for necessity of the processes of the transcendent material reality indicates a fundamental realisation that left 'to itself' such a reality is contingent, unless it acquires its necessity from elsewhere. This is to say that an appeal to an absolute geometrician as a divine source of mathematical discourse is not an attempt to please the power of the church, but a discursive effort to legitimate the necessity of an otherwise contingently construed reality and the correlative necessity of the presumed objective theory and method.

Contingency excludes essentiality, i.e. the possibility for a vertical intentionality to maintain something permanent in the perceptual world with necessary characteristics, or in case of induction, essentiality with universal validity in the sphere of ontology. The abolition of essentiality (the Greek notion of essential composition of something real) opens the door to the notion of an access to this reality in terms of *possibility*. This is to say, since what *is* cannot be perceived, and since its being posited as transcendent reality does not offer any necessity for its composition, then it can be accessed and dealt with in accordance with possible discourses as theoretical-methodological explanations and means of accessing reality. This is precisely the juncture at which it becomes 'necessary' to regard this transcendent reality in accordance with what it can possibly be. And at this level we are in the postmodern world with all sorts of possible discourses, each constructing its 'reality' without any need to claim that it represents some reality. Result, not only multi-discursivity, but also multi-culturalism – none, of course, having any necessity.

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Moderni postmodernybė ir diskursyvi galia. 1 dalis

Santrauka

Šiame tekste tyrinėjami modernių ir postmodernių prielaidų, esą pasaulis yra diskursų ir jų galios konstruktas, pagrindai. Tokios prielaidos padeda atskirti percepcijos pasaulį, įskaitant gyvenamąjį pasaulį, ir numatyti modernaus subjekto, specifiskai interpretuojančio tikrovę, pasirodymą. Kyla klausimas – kaip galimas modernaus subjekto sąlytis su tikrove, jei tariama, kad tokia tikrovė neprieinama tiesioginei percepcinei intuicijai? Tačiau subjektui tenka tam tikru būdu konstruoti metodologinius ir teorinius diskursus, kurie ne reprezentuoja, bet „gamina“ modernią tikrovę.

Raktažodžiai: diskursas, galia, galimybė, metodas, subjektas, projekcija