

Per Lind
PhD Candidate
Lund university, Sweden

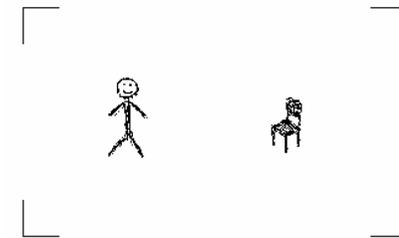
The Epistemological Elements of Postmodernity

- Being an exercise in deliberate philosophical crudeness -

PRINE Workshop:
*Philosophy of Religion
in Postmodernity*
Oslo 11-14/3 2010

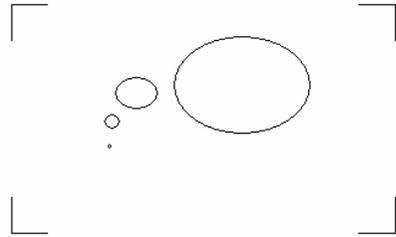
1

Starring: The Subject and the Object



2

Subjectivity



3

*And
the ghostly voices of ...*

Three philosophers

4

ACT ONE

Scene 1: Naïve realism
or
The givenness of objects

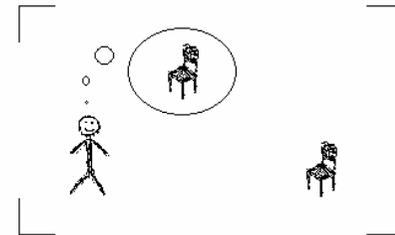


"A chair is a chair is a chair."

5

ACT ONE:

Scene 2:
The secondariness (mere
attributability) of subjectivity



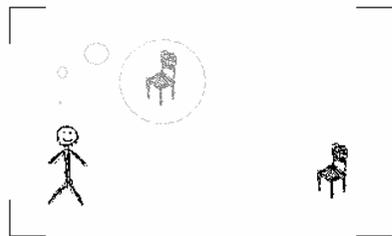
"(As far as I am concerned) a
chair is a chair is a chair."

6

ACT ONE:

Scene 3: Modernity

The facticity of subjectivity is philosophically uninteresting. It is merely what allows the objects of reality to appear. Besides, "we all do it". To dwell upon it leads nowhere, or worse (solipsism).



Content, on the other hand, is king. For all intents and purposes, a chair is a chair is a chair.

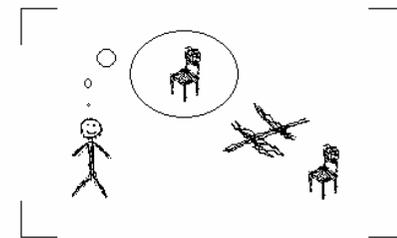
7

ACT TWO:

Scene 1: Criticism or

Postmodernity

*How can you equal the inner with the outer?
Appearance is always primary to what appears.*



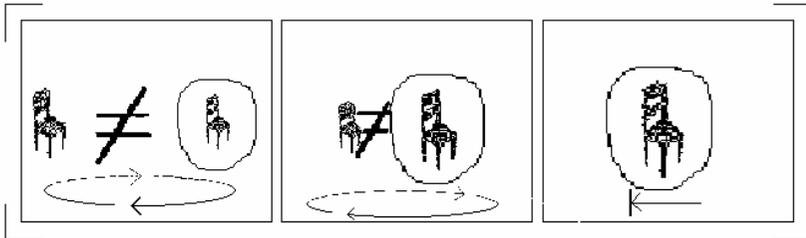
*How do you presume to break out of the
sphere of subjectivity?*

8

ACT TWO:

Scene 2: Postmodernity, continued

*We can never ask our reality map about
what's behind it.*



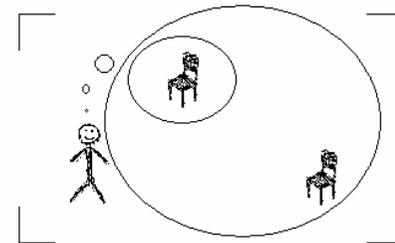
*Even the idea of something residing behind
our reality map belongs to the map. Like
it or not, our very understanding of reality
also hides it from us.*

9

ACT TWO:

Scene 3: Postmodernity, continued

Subjectivity is, in fact, all there is.



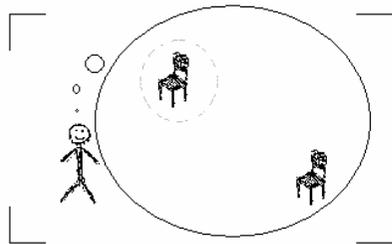
*Any intercourse with reality is, on the
abstract, intellectual level, a monologue.
Given the facticity and primacy of
subjectivity, there can be no other way.*

10

ACT THREE:

Scene 1: A modernist reply

*You claim that I equal the inner with the outer, but, in actual fact, **you** confuse them with each other by sorting them under the same category.*



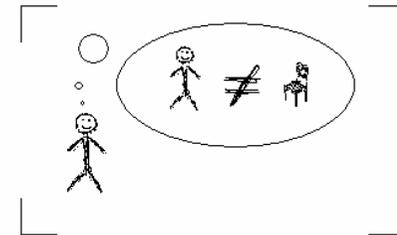
*How do we separate fantasy from reality if all is essentially mind? I am not so sure about you guys, but **science** sure is no monologue. And the real world is certainly not mind, otherwise I'd never miss the bus as long as I think I don't. Yet reality keeps talking back to me.*

11

ACT THREE:

Scene 2: A Postmodernist clarification

We do not claim the so called real world to be mind only, but merely our understanding and mapping of it, which is all we have.



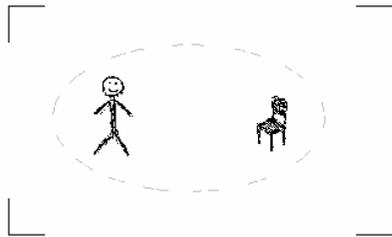
*We share your understanding of the real world (for lack of a better term) as not-mind in the demonstrated sense, but maintain precisely that it is an **understanding**. Meaning, the distinction between mind and not-mind is ours. Subject and object are tools of our own making.*

12

ACT THREE:

Scene 3: A Modernist reply to the clarification

Can we please leave Kindergarten? Of course our **understanding** is mind! Of course the distinction is ours! However, as said before, this is of no major concern.

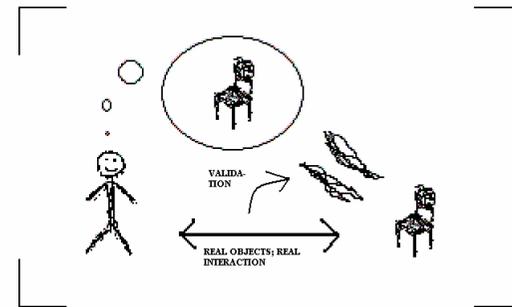


Just like the natural focus of subjectivity lies not on itself, but on the objects thereof, so is our focus here centered not on the facticity, but the **content** of mind. The asphalt beneath my feet may be primary to my walking to the job, but that doesn't make the former more interesting than the latter.

13

ACT THREE:

Scene 4: Modernist reply, continued
It's the nature of subjectivity to represent what transcends itself, just as it is the nature of all representation to point beyond itself. Look around you! We are no captives of language. It is perfectly capable of getting us where we want to go. If concepts didn't hit their mark, reality wouldn't fail to prove us wrong.



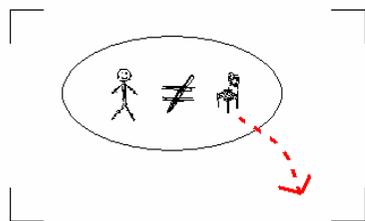
Wake up! What you guys call metaphysical, impossible and naïve is something entirely, completely ordinary. We access external, independent reality on a daily basis. There's nothing to it. Besides, do you seriously entertain the notion of solipsism?

14

ACT THREE:

Scene 5: Postmodernist clarification #2

*You fail to see the point. The fact that we **master the distinction** between subject and object in our daily lives doesn't warrant our intellect to "ride the line of projection" of one of its constituents to an allegedly real extra-subjective referent.*

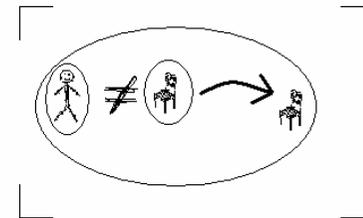


15

ACT THREE:

Scene 6: Postmodernist clarification #3

Granted, every representation necessarily points beyond the representing element; that's what they do.



We simply need to realize that whatever is represented thereby is "always already", as far as the intellect is concerned, conceptualized by us.

16

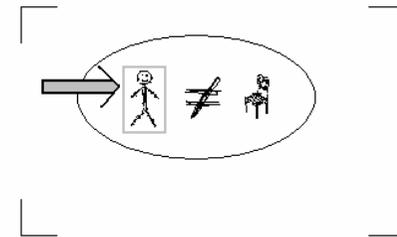
*This is about as far as these conversations usually go before they begin to, at best, tread water. The present show must go on, however. Hence, for the sake of metaphorical constancy, let us assume that the stage at this point is stormed by an impatient **THIRD** philosopher.*

17

ACT FOUR:

Scene 1: The 3rd voice

You BOTH fail to see the point: There's a little gremlin in the works.



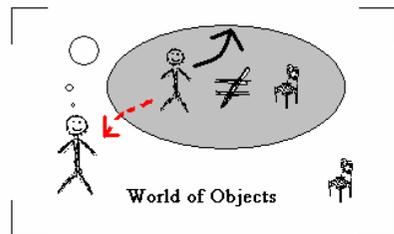
This little fellow, unlike the other constituent of the distinction, demonstrates an ambiguity of far-reaching consequence.

18

ACT FOUR:

Scene 2: The 3rd voice, continued

 is alternately, but never simultaneously, read as the object aspect of the subject, i.e. an objectification much like any other, and the extra-subjective referent of the same, namely, the (presumably unobjectified) subjectivity aspect doing the objectification.

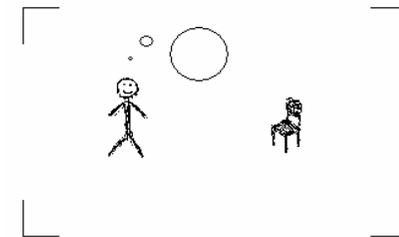


I refer to the mechanics of this mixup as "Tarski's slide", after his ingenious convention "T"-equivalences for the material adequacy of truth theories (i.e. that "'Snow is white' is [should only count as] true if, and only if, snow is white."), where a similar trick of the mind is utilized. Moreover, for reasons that should be obvious, I call the relation between the two readings mixed up here by the name "projective identity". 19

ACT FOUR:

Scene 3: The 3rd voice, continued:

My proposal is that, depending on whichever is dominant at any given moment, a modernist or a postmodernist epistemological outlook is rendered.



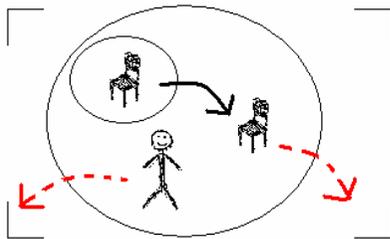
When emphasis is put on the object aspect of the subject, subjectivity becomes a mere attribute of a special class of already unproblematically real objects. A modernist, "naïvely" realist outlook is rendered.

20

ACT FOUR:

Scene 4: The 3rd voice, continued

When emphasis is put on the subjectivity aspect of the subject, objectivity becomes a mere attribute of that special class of subjective appearances that make up the so called external world to us.



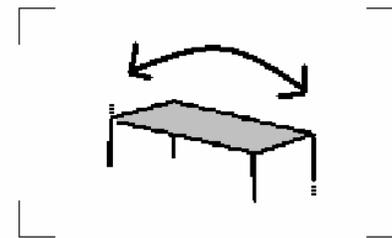
The logical end point of the line of projection of linguistic representation becomes but a name doing the work of an object. In other words, a postmodernist outlook is rendered.

21

ACT FOUR:

Scene 5: The 3rd voice, continued

Inasmuch as it has  as its starting point, the conceptual framework of the present debate is therefore comparable to a wobbly table, that rocks back and forth between two different, projectively identical positions of relative stability: Always supported by three, but never all four legs.



*Not only is any apparent stability but half the story, since one leg is always left in the air. More importantly; whatever stability is there, is there **in virtue of** one leg being left in the air.*

22

ACT FOUR:

Scene 6:

Logically, it is either objects, with the memory of subjectivity shuffled in (and, upon hostile scrutiny, declared to be philosophically insignificant), or subjectivity, with the memory of objects shuffled in (and, upon hostile scrutiny, declared to be philosophically insignificant).

When the table tips over without our notice, as it frequently does, what we get, however, is no such neat symmetry, but a logically troublesome mixture of these two profoundly incoherent outlooks. Instead of the memory of the one projected on the actuality of the other, we get two sets, or cultures if you will, of actuality competing with each other.

23

ACT FOUR

Scene 7:

The doubtful integrity of 

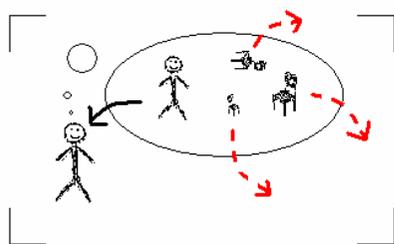
*Since our objectification of ourselves **means** ourselves, and since the reality of this objectification (ourselves) for this very reason is (wrongly) considered an internal affair, our epistemological project gets an illegitimate head start: the objectivity (extra-subjectivity) of the subject.*

*Thus, the epistemological question (which holds the "possibility" of solipsism) rests upon the identification of a certain objectification, on the one hand, with its referent (here: whatever is **doing** the objectification) on the other. Put differently, it rests upon the identification of a certain entity of mind with a certain entity of reality.*

24

ACT FOUR

Scene 8: Intermission
Consider the "solus ipse" of solipsism:

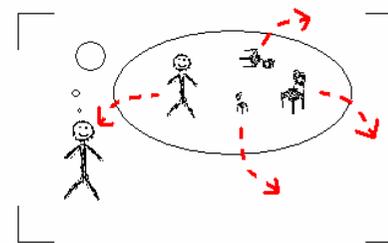


*In order to be, precisely, a "lone self" (solus ipse), incapable of transcending the boundaries of its own subjectivity, it has to be a **real** self, and, unlike the other alleged objects, not merely a subjective appearance.*

25

ACT FOUR

Scene 9: Intermission, continued
...but this external (for it has to be extra-subjective, i.e. external) reality of the "solus ipse" is just as challenged as the reality of any other object in this setting:



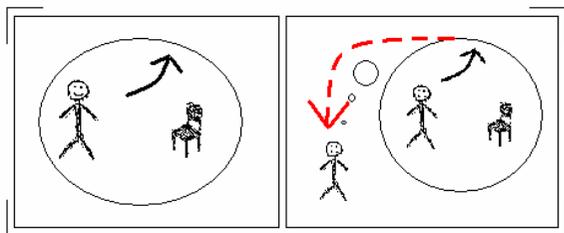
Even when objectified as consciousness itself, the "solus ipse" remains a mere idea, a mere conception, of consciousness itself – unless allowed to be extra-subjectively real. Thus, in either case, it shares in the fate of the rest of the world, and is no longer solus, only ipse.

26

ACT FOUR

Scene 10: Doubtful integrity, continued

Just as an eye cannot see itself, but merely its own reflection, so must an objectification be of a different order than its author, even if the objectification in question is an objectification (reflection) of that same author, and hence refers back to it as its meaning.



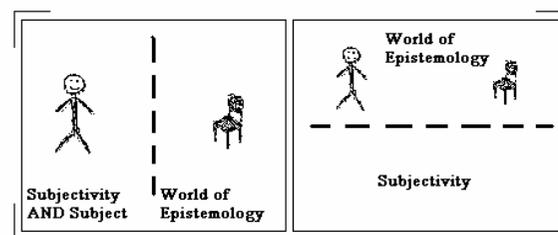
Meaning, just as a reflection of an eye cannot see, so subjectivity cannot enter one of its own creations.

27

ACT FOUR

Scene 11: Doubtful integrity, continued

*...Which is precisely what it goes ahead and does anyway. This is why epistemology (confer the case of solipsism) is regularly assumed [RIGHT SIDE] to begin with (that is, solely deal with the world external to) the subject **as conceived by ourselves**, not with [LEFT SIDE] pure subjectivity **conceiving ourselves** along with the world.*

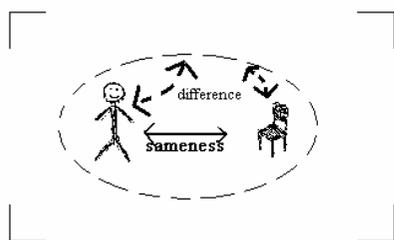


28

ACT FOUR

Scene 12: Conclusion

In conclusion, the dichotomy of subject and object is not about difference at all; it is about sameness. The difference (and epistemological problem) perceived therein is due to the double nature of the subject.



The object aspect is equally distributed between both constituents, and so is also their status as being different from the sphere of subjectivity itself.

29

ACT FOUR

Scene 13: Conclusion, continued

Parted by the binary readings of ,

***The modernist** rightly considers the object aspect of things unsecondary to subjectivity, but wrongly tries to stave off the latter from the field of philosophy.*

***The postmodernist** equally rightly considers subjectivity unsecondary to the object aspect of things, but equally wrongly tries to stave off the latter from the field of philosophy.*

The End

30