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Disquisition on Subjectivity: Interpretations and Insights

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Abstract

The present paper investigates subjectivity from an interdisciplinary spectrum. The concept of subjectivity, its origin, consequences and significance have lingered human existence from antiquity. Subjectivity has been showered with myriads of interpretations over the period by great and gigantic names from varied disciplines i.e. history, philosophy, cultural studies, science et al. The paper intends at a wholesome view on the concept compendiously. It would set forth the varied interpretations and contemporary theories for subjectivity. Foucault is a colossus of power relations. He is one of the most prominent figures when it comes to subjectivity. He is inevitable and paramount, with him came a revolutionary insight in the theory of subjectivity. It became the interplay of power relations. The paper will diligently analyse on how Foucault unravelled strategic relationships between histories and all its practices to illuminate the truth about context and it claims. Foucault's subjects are conduits, bearers or sites of discourses of power and knowledge, enlightening the establishment of social construction of subjectivity by the means of moral agency and coercive ideology.

Keywords- *Subjects, Power/knowledge, Agency, Discipline, Consciousness, Ideology*

Theories of subjectivity have been crucial to cultural studies project.: ranging from structures of feeling minimal selves by Stuart Hall, sexed self by the feminists to mimicry by Homi Bhabha then came the wave of the death of subject, subject of feminism and Edward Said's oriental other. Subjectivity is the cultural theory in process. The word 'self' does not capture the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the word 'subject'. In this way subject is always linked to something outside of it; an idea or a principle or a society of other subjects. One is always a subject to or of something. The word subject therefore proposes that self is not a separated or isolated entity, but one that operates at the intersection of general truths and principles, they determine or are determined by us as individuals, precisely the range of their power has dominated theory and debate.

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The earlier philosophers saw subject as free and autonomous. Rene Descartes theorised on his famous declaration *Cognito Ergo Sum*, I think therefore I am, which talks about the conscious subject. Who know who is he, where he stands and for what he stands. The key to knowledge was to be found in the formulation about the word 'I' shows the new understanding of the human place in the world. Two keys to the philosophy of Rene Descartes were before 'I' am anything 'I' am 'I' and second self-defined by rational faculties it can use to order the world I make sense.

Rousseau's sensibility and Kant's unity of reason circulate in our minds as images. Each and every representation a human being makes of the world, according to Kant, from the most simple sensory perception to the most complex formula, is understood to be grounded in the 'I' that perceives. In order for us to be in any contact with the world, according to Kant, we must have an awareness of ourselves, and a sense of unity-sufficiency. If Rousseau fulfilled the first theme we discovered in Descartes (that the self is a sufficient starting-point for the analysis of the world), Kant fulfils the second: the equation between selfhood and consciousness. It is the foundation on which that individuality is built, the sense that experience of the world is focussed on a thing that is aware, that is processing the information it receives, that is turning mutations in the field of light into meaningful representations that can lead to judgement and action. Kant understands of that 'aware' entity is more intense than merely the word 'conscious' would allow. The sheer scale and intensity of individual experience entitles it to be the basis, the starting- point and ground of all meaning. Kant, too, imagined world that started with the individual's acts of perception, of the conscious subject as the origin of the human processes of meaning-making.

Heidegger's project defines our place in the world not in terms of some artificial construct, but in the terms of most fundamental aspects of life: Being itself. To him there is no such simple separation from the world. '*Dasien*' is constituted by the fact that it is in the world and belongs to it. The world concerns us and our relationship to it is one of care. We are not aliens enclosed within our fortress-selves, in a world that is absolutely foreign to us. Our experience conjoins us to the world.

Subjectivity and culture are being conditioned, indeed, is played out in the shadow of the debates that Heidegger's work has influenced. This is seen in three ways- firstly subject is not a naturally occurring thing, but a philosophical category of thought that has arose in a certain point in history, and that will be supplanted by more convincing models of what the human experience of the world is like.

Psychoanalysis is the key school of thought which attempts to explain the truth of the subject through how its interior life is structured, it is formed, and it can explain both uniquely individual traits (e.g. nervous system and sexual tastes) and vastly public ones (e.g. the politics of gender and culture) its authority rests on the assumption, found nearly

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everywhere in western thought in the modern era, that its object is quantifiable and knowable- in short a real thing with a fixed structure, operating in knowable and predictable patterns. Because of its commitment to this idea of stable and recognisable models, psychoanalysis is considered to be a key subjective theory of the subject.

Lacan gives the two images- imaginary and symbolic. The complex experience where the subjects feels its unity and separation in response to what it has seen of itself in the mirror, because it is governed by the image- the imaginary. The wonderful sense of unity and oneness is not as simple as it may seem, however. The image of the self as separate has not been something that the subject has developed for itself, from within, as a result of its own creativity, or as an expression of its own interior, naturally occurring truth.

The subject, then, is in a state of contradiction. It sees itself as unified and whole, as autonomous and complete, but this very imaginary identity subverts that wholeness. The selfhood, the subjective centre of gravity-is grounded outside of oneself, in the very field of images from which you first gained a sense of separation.

The 'Real' is the third order of the Lacanian system. It is the amalgamation of the earlier orders. Subjectivity is attained only at the end of a process which has many complex and dangerous passages. Subjectivity therefore is always problematic. The subject is merely a fragment of a dynamic field of endless in completions and disjunctions. The subject enters the symbolic thinking that what it will gain is the intense self-identity it thought it found in the mirror image.

Theories that have lately influenced the thought have either attempted to define the nature or structure of the subject (its truth), and those who seek definition of subjectivity as the product of culture and power.

The fathers of psychoanalysis are committed to stability, order and a fix and constant identity. The daughter on the other hand, is able to develop a detailed model that reveal, beneath the father's ordered world. For Freud, the formation of the subject reaches a stable state when a meaningful and predictable dividing line forms between the individual very proper rational and social concerns, and the private and obscure remnants of the cruel and inevitable oedipal drama. Julia Kristeva on the other hand considers it to be a host of uncertainty and unresolved images and emotions. Implicit in this contrast in a whole cultural politics: the context between the traditional power hoping to be able to control and manage a stable and knowable world, and a subversive force seeking to set future of the world in motion again, into a hopeful and productive uncertainty.

Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) developed a definition of subject's place under capitalism in late 1960's. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (Althusser 1971), this essay investigates how the structure of the capitalist society reproduces itself. How do successive generations become the docile workers and consumers the capitalist

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system needs? This cannot be done only by Repressive State Apparatuses, like the army, police and prison system. The answer is to be found in the institutions that reproduce the values, meanings and logic of the capitalist system- what are called Ideological State Apparatuses, like the church, family and the especially the school and even the mass media. Ideology needs subjectivity. Subjectivity, therefore, is the type of being; we become as we fit into the needs of the larger political imperatives of the capitalist state. It requires us not only to behave in certain ways, but to be certain types of people.

The prime idea that Foucault has derived from Nietzsche's argument is that 'subjects' only come into existence through the complex interplay between power and language. A new type of power arose, one invested in systems of social administration rather than lodged in individual and titles – in other words, a power built around institutions 'prisons, work houses, school, factories, hospitals, barracks' rather than around kings and aristocrats. In order that human populations could be better organised, new mechanism of power need to be developed.

The new impersonal power growing with the modern age did something similar, according to Foucault. It developed new truths about human beings which distinguished normal from abnormal behaviour. The range of discussions, studies, surveys, theories and reports (collectively called discourses) produced by these disciplines were not always consistent. Discipline and knowledge always divide the human population into distinct category that is one of the prime instruments of power.

For Foucault there is no oppression from outside, it is the same individual who is the vehicle of his own subjectification.

The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not a vis-à-vis of power; it is I believe, one of its prime effects. The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the articulation. The individual which power has constructed is at the same time its vehicle. (Foucault 1980b, p.98)

Foucault sees this narrative the other way round. Power comes first, he argues, and the 'individual' – and all the things we identified as making up our individuality "Our separate body, its idiosyncratic gestures, its specific way of using language, its secret desires" – Our really effects of power, design for us rather than by us. As a result, we are not the antagonists of power, standing apposite. We are very material of power, the thing through which it finds

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its expression. What makes us such an effective 'Vehicle' for power is the very fact that we seek to see ourselves as free of it and naturally occurring. For Foucault, Rousseau's free and autonomous individual is not merely an alternative, outmoded theory of subjectivity, a quaint forerunner to contemporary discussions. This very model is the one that allows power to conceal itself and to operate so effectively.

The subjectivity of both the citizens in the street and the prisoner are constantly being analysed and measured. The functions of this analysis are threefold: to individualise, normalize and hierarchize. Firstly, the subject is to be seen and to feel separate from others. Secondly, this allows us to be measured according to the standard of behaviour. The application of norms, certain behaviour – and thus certain subjects can be compared with one another. Hierarchies of the more or less criminal, the more or less acceptable can be designed. According to Foucault, the panopticon is typical of the processes of subjectification that governs modern life. Power organises the population into individual units that are then subject to monitoring in a system of maximum visibility. This works most effectively in institutions. Hospitals, schools and universities, banks, department of social securities and tax all keep files on us. We simply forget about these files, or accept them as a necessary and inevitable part of the operation of the institutions. Yet they are our effective social reality, and contain 'truths' about us that can be manipulated outside of our control. Like the files themselves, the truth they contain about us is not our property. SPYCAMS, ADHARCARDS, BANKING.

The new insight which Foucault's study has given to subjectivity has widened the doorway to the realms of possibilities and researches. The way of the modern world is treading on the pathway of new category of subject, power relations, servitude and selves; trying to fit into the structures of society and government. Therefore this subjectivity will further be investigated and this disquisition be further enriched.

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