

Transition and Orientation

The key point in last week's reading (Chapter 7) can be put this way: Whatever they happen to be about, and whatever form they take, thoughts communicate "the substantiality of their content." By insisting on substance, they obscure space freedom (53).

How do thoughts do this? By constructing "a seamless whole," (58), which lets them transform "the transitional constructions of multidimensional appearance" into an established reality. (Compare the reference at KTS 371 to "the transitional operation of indeterminate fields of knowledge.")

Although the reading for last week did not emphasize it, it's important to note that the substance that thoughts communicate is our own 'substance' as selves: the identity of 'me and my world'. Thoughts shape and determine the 'who' of who we are, and this in turn determines how we react to what life presents, shutting down our freedom to respond decisively to each arising situation. For a discussion of this point, framed in a somewhat different vocabulary, see DTS 116-121.

As we saw, practices that aim to silence thoughts or let them fade away, while potentially helpful, do not really challenge the fundamental claim that thoughts have the power to establish as real whatever content they generate. In fact, it is hard to see how such a challenge could be mounted, since thoughts claim to be 'nothing at all' (just like conventional space). When thoughts have always already withdrawn from view, what can we do to undermine their claims?

One way to engage experience differently, to "unknow the knowing of the known to know anew." (57) One way to do this is to flatten appearance, an approach presented in Chapter 6 (Week 2). In Chapter 7, the idea of "flattening" is worked out in a little more detail. In a flattened realm (58) points become pointless, and appearance arises side by side with the operations that are thought to cause that appearance. That is why the text speaks of transitional constructions and operations: nothing is ever established and no process ever leads to a fixed result. Since that is so, each moment allows for decisive action and perfect freedom. See if you can make this understanding the walkabout for the week. An easy way to think of it is this: whatever happens, it could all be different in the next moment. There is no need to conduct the sameness of the same.

Here's a question that doesn't come up that often in the TSK Vision: If you give up your commitment to what is proclaimed to be so, if nothing is ever established, must you also give up what you cherish most—the values, relationships, and insights that seem to you to be most meaningful? Think this through for yourself, and if you like, write a paragraph or two on the 'conclusions' you reach.

The reading for this next week, which concludes the DTS treatment of space, shifts the focus from thoughts to stories. We might think that stories are made up out of thoughts, in somewhat the same way that molecules are made out of atoms. But the opening of this chapter sees things the other way round: stories "provide the raw materials out of which thoughts shape identities." You

might want to reflect on this interplay. If stories enable thoughts to make their claims, how do stories get constructed? Where do they come from?

The reading for this week emphasizes “the story of substance.” Is this simply a ‘retelling’ of the story of how content arises, told in the previous chapter, or does this analysis add a new level of insight? Again, how does the observation that “story and substance . . . occupy different dimensions of reality” (61) square with the ‘flatness’ discussed above, which suggests that appearance and the cause of appearance operate on the same level?