

9.5 Theses -- on Postmodernism and After

1. What one urges for after postmodernism depends on what one means by postmodernism. That in turn depends on one's notion of modernity.
2. Modernity is not the same as modernism, which in some of the arts challenges modernity.
3. If modernity has to do with simple identities and systematic universal unity in a flattened uniformized logical space, then postmodernism challenges such unities.
4. If modernity has to do with claims about the adequacy of rational conceptual systems, then postmodernism challenges such adequacy.
5. If modernity has to do with a maximizing rational subjectivity then postmodernism challenges the unity and the adequacy of such subjectivity.

6. Here are some botanized varieties of postmodernism with regard to unity and subjectivity:

Pomo1 is social constructionism with respect to norms and social unities and values. This is old news. It is a modernist theory based on a dominating individual or social subjectivity working on passive stuff and data. (widespread)

Pomo2 adds to Pomo1's social constructivism a severe multiplication of unities and discourses with no resolution or totality, but still with a basically modern subjectivity hovering ironically over it all. (widespread)

Pomo3 adds to Pomo2's multiplication a (probably inconsistent) assertion of total relativism. (widespread)

Pomo4 questions the unity of the constructing subjectivity. (Deleuze, Foucault)

Pomo5 questions the unity of the constructed discourses (Derrida, Deleuze).

Pomo6 destroys unities by dissolving them in a presumed ultimate flow of signifiers, simulacra, capital, or the like. (Baudrillard, Kroker)

Pomo7 locates unities and norms in a field they don't control, and in so doing inhabits them transgressively, showing that they are not what they claim to be, that their working is an effect rather than an origin. The unities and norms have their being through not quite being what they claim to be. (Derrida)

7. To these we might add a cross classification based on what non-conceptual

background or matrix is asserted to transcend conceptual knowing. (variously, Bataille, Blanchot, Derrida, Gendlin, et. al.) "More than conceptual intricacy" is not enough since it can mean many things, from Hegel's Vernunft to Derrida's differance to Nietzsche's conflicting conflicted wills, and so on.

8. What might come after all these postmodernisms would hardly be one view or movement. But a common feature might be found in what I called Pomo7, a reaffirmation of unities and norms in an excessive context. Such views would need to avoid the One System Fits All that is (only one notion of) modernism, yet without falling into the No System At All that is some postmodernisms. Pomo7 is very close to what Gene Gendlin is calling for 'after' postmodernism. At its best (though seldom at its best) Pomo7 does not bring the "arbitrariness, stoppage, an inability to think further" cited in the conference statement.

9. The deep issues here concern the status of fields of possibility and norms and how they become definite. "The process of the generation of meaning"--how do facticity, the body, history, as well as formal structures enter and emerge from this process?

9.5. The conference statement says "if we absorb postmodernism ...". This is a disturbing use of words. What kind of 'we' is it that 'absorbs' ideas and movements?

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