

ABSTRACT

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Title of the Ph.D. Thesis: After Post-Modernism: Ethics, Virtuality and Politics

This research problematizes the notion of the demise of theory in general and that of the moment of postmodernism in particular and contends that, far from dying, theory is very much alive and kicking. The thesis illustrates that though contemporary theory is proliferating in all kinds of directions and though it has become a spectral presence in all kinds of discourses, the three basic directions in which it seems to have advanced involve: the turn towards ethics, towards virtuality/technology and towards politics.

The first chapter of the thesis is titled “Agamben, Badiou and the Ethical Turn in Post Postmodern Thought” and juxtaposes two authors with very similar concerns to illustrate how contemporary thought is committed to an ethical concern for the other and shows that this concern is a further intensification of that strand within postmodernism which privileges the non-normative, the other and enables the formulation of an ethical possibility. However, this chapter also shows that this ‘turn’ towards ethics is discontinuous with the relativistic strand within postmodernism. Therefore, in the final analysis, this concern with ethics is both continuous as well as discontinuous with postmodern poetics.

The second section of the thesis is titled “Castells, Virilio and the Concern with Virtuality in Post Postmodern Thought” and examines the post postmodern concern with virtuality and information technology from different angles: from a descriptive to a critical angle, Castells being ambivalent and Virilio mostly pessimistic about the impact

of technology. This section shows how this dual concern with virtuality, as brought about by developments in cybernetics and networked communication, is more in continuation with the mode in which postmodernism engaged with the same.

Chapter 3 of the thesis is titled “Slavoj Žižek and the ‘Return’ to Politics” and examines the formulations of Slavoj Žižek to study how in contemporary thinking there is a significant shift from a more relativistic political posturing within postmodernism to a more grounded engagement with politics today. The relativistic strand of postmodernism is severely critiqued by him, as it suppresses the emergence of a genuine space for the political. Žižek argues for a politicization of all spheres, in fact a politicization of politics as a counter balance to post political trends in contemporary thought. Needless to say, this third feature is more at a disconnect with postmodernism.

The conclusion ties together these different findings made in the body of the thesis and shows how the concern with ethics in post postmodern thought is both continuous as well as discontinuous with postmodern thought, with virtuality, a further intensification of postmodern concerns can be noticed and the ‘return’ to a politically grounded poetics is a distinct departure from postmodern thought, to frame a schematic map of post-theoretical and post-postmodern thought in relation to what preceded it, namely postmodernism.

The conclusion also emphasizes that these three concerns overlap in the thought of the theorists under discussion as much as in real life; that ethics without politics is empty talk, politics without ethics is disastrous and both without technology are inefficacious in a technology dominated world of ours. Moreover, technology without ethics and politics is a body without a heart and a soul; stopped by nothing, such technology is capable of infinite destruction.