

Some remarks on Modernity and Post-modernism and/or Post-structuralism

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Lecture Outline:

1. Modernity

Time frame

Causes and effects

Hallmarks of modern thought

2. A ridiculous attempt to sketch 2 centuries of phenomenology

Kant and Hegel

German Phenomenology: Husserl and Heidegger

French phenomenology: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir

3. Post-phenomenology: a philosophy of radical difference

4. Postmodernism

The term "postmodernism"

Difference as productive of identity

5. Some key points of "post-modern" thinkers.

"Postmodernists"

"French Feminists"

Deconstruction

Deleuze and Guattari represent one wing of contemporary French philosophy, what one can call "historical-libidinal materialism." Next week's lecture will be devoted to explicating this term and tracing its development through Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. Tonight's lecture will situate D/G by contrast to the development of the other wing of contemporary French philosophy, what one can call "post-phenomenological philosophy of radical difference."

Both these wings are known as "post-modern." To understand this term, we must understand something of the term "modernity."

Modernity

Time frame

"Modernity" is a term whose temporal range depends on discipline. We can safely say it concerns post 1600 Europe at the earliest, that is, post-Renaissance (Northern Europe version). In philosophy, for instance, modern philosophy is said to begin with Descartes (peak @ 1640). In literature and the arts, however, *modernism* is a 1920-50s phenomenon: Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Schoenberg, Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, et al.

Causes and effects

The modern age is brought on by the acceleration in economic activity throughout the European "world-system" in the years following, let's say, 1750. This is of course an arbitrary date; one could say Europe's "renaissance" extends as far back as the 11th century. Many causes of this acceleration can be adduced; certainly New World gold and sugar, produced with African slave labor were prime factors. Whatever the causes, the years after 1750 saw various governmental and cultural changes accompany and accelerate, in "mutual presupposition," these economic changes. The basic change is a "decoding" of behavior, and the substitution of an "axiomatic," a flexible and wide-ranging steering of things within expected parameters ("freedom") via a basic abstract quantity of value expressed as money, rather than a detailed code of specific actions. (Cf Marx: "all that is solid melts into air"). This process involves an internalization of constraints, a rendering predictable of behavior from the inside--but this is no inborn "conscience" but the result of specific social practices of child rearing, education, church practices (confession, diaries, etc), workplace practices, etc.

Hallmarks of modern thought

1. Humanism. The human being is the source of meaning and value. Nature is valued only as useful to humans. The development of human potential is the highest goal of politics.
2. Individualism. The individual is both ethically and intellectually prior to society. Humans have rights governments must acknowledge in limiting government action. Intellectual progress, and hence techno-econ progress, is made by leaps of genius.
3. Rationalism. There is a natural human faculty of reason, in two guises, theoretical and practical, moving from universal principles to particular applications. Reason and knowledge are antithetical to power, which is centralized and repressive.
4. Secular moralism. Human reason alone can allow moral actions and moral society, if freed from the superstition and prejudice of religious dogmatism.
5. Progressive history and progress. Human history is progressive: moderns are more humane and moral, because of the public use of reason in governmental rationality, than previous ages.

A ridiculous attempt to sketch 2 centuries of phenomenology

The post-phenomenological wing of contemporary French philosophy can be traced to the work of Kant and Hegel, via the German phenomenologies of Husserl and Heidegger, and the French phenomenologies of Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir.

In brief, phenomenology is a radical subjectivism in which the sense or meaning of otherness derives from constituting acts of subjective intention -- or a tradition of intersubjective meanings, as we find ourselves in world of objects with pre-given meanings. Time synthesis and intentionality are the primary laws of subjectivity. Phenomenology is not a sheer subjective idealism, since the meaning "other than the subject" is always there in intending things; nonetheless, phenomenology is criticized by the post-phenomenologists for presupposing a horizon of identity w/in which difference or alterity appears.

Kant and Hegel

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), a prototypical modern thinker, embodies all the elements of modern thought we enunciated above. Let me give a short sketch of what he tried to accomplish in his critical system. Kant revolutionized philosophy by instituting a radical break with the two dominant schools of the preceding generation, empiricism and rationalism, which he saw as beset with fatal tendencies to skepticism and dogmatism, respectively. His great discovery was the transcendental field: the reflection on experience to show the universal and necessary ("a priori") conditions of its unity and coherence.

Kant's three major works are entitled "Critiques." By this Kant means the reflection on the limits and possibility of experience. Critique means that Kant will take nothing for granted: if there is unity and coherence in experience, then these must be accounted for by explicit philosophical argument, not by recourse to dogmatic assumptions about a rational and beneficent God. For Kant, such dogmatism was more dangerous than outright empiricist skepticism, for the inevitable disappointment of dogmatic belief would lead the young, he feared, into a disgust with reason as a whole. Because of his critical stance, Kant was seen as an extremely radical thinker in his time; he was even, memorably, once called the "all-Destroyer." In fact, he does deserve something like that title, for although he tries to recuperate notions of God, the soul, and the cosmos as postulates, as necessary presuppositions, after Kant these staples of dogmatic rationalism have lost forever their status as scientific knowledge.

The three Critiques tackle three major areas of experience: 1) scientific knowledge (nature as determined by laws); 2) morality (human nature as freedom); 3) aesthetic/teleological judgment (nature as "self-organizing" [NB: scare quotes necessary because for Kant natural self-organization is only an inscrutable limit idea for which we must substitute the idea of a beneficent producer, a moral artisanal God]). The three Critiques are linked in the following way: Kant will limit scientific knowledge to allow for the negative idea of freedom as non-determination (1st Critique), then establish

moral freedom as self-determination (2nd Critique), then attempt to find a way to mediate the realms of nature and freedom the first two works drove asunder (3rd Critique).

GWF Hegel (1770-1832) is a much more problematic "modern" thinker, at least in some more subtle readings. Hegel came along after some interesting developments in what is called "German Idealism" to historicize the transcendental field opened up by Kant. In other words, Hegel showed the way in which different historical epochs had different categorial structures resulting in different fundamental "experiences." Hegel also showed how these transcendental categorial changes occur on the practical and political level, not just the theoretical knowing level. Thus he thought he had unified the theory-practice split in Kant. The problem with Hegel is that he has a tendency to talk as if there were a "spirit" or "subject" of an age that undergoes an "education" through history pointing toward the modern age of freedom as self-determination concretized in liberal democracy: the infamous "end of history" thesis most recently revived by Francis Fukuyama. Hegel's history though is Eurocentric, totalizing, and teleological; a major preoccupation of the post-war French intellectual generation is to "escape" from Hegel. This is a very tricky business, however, as Foucault lets us know in his inaugural address, entitled "L'ordre du discours," to the Collège de France in 1970: "We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us."

German Phenomenology: Husserl and Heidegger

One man established phenomenology *per se*: Edmund Husserl (peak years 1900-38); his formula: "to the things themselves!" Husserl's terminology is notoriously difficult. The basic difference between Kant and Husserl is that Husserl focuses on concrete descriptions of the individual ego, albeit described at a transcendental level--what makes possible this experience right now--as opposed to Kant's abstract, universal and anonymous TUA. One way to put it: Kant works from the top-down: he asks what must an object be to be experienceable (temporal-spatial and categorial-schematized) and then locates those requirements in the subject; Husserl on the other hand works from the bottom up, concretely describing the "between" of subject and object, what he called "intentionality." The early Husserl at least was thoroughly intellectual, purporting to show that a theoretical knowledge relation underlay any other type of relation of subject to object: ethical, aesthetic, practical, productive, etc.

Husserl's major successor was Martin Heidegger (peak years 1927-62). In a sense, Heidegger does to Husserl what Hegel did to Kant: he historicized and rendered practical Husserl's transcendental field. Heidegger insisted on the personal nature of existence and on its practical ground: my immediate relation to things is that of getting around in the world, of "caring for myself." He later came up with a notion of historical epochs--something like Hegel, but not tied to the figure of an experience of spirit, and hence not teleologically ordered--in which the basic categorial structure of an age could be described from attention to the "basic words" uttered in classic philosophy texts.

French phenomenology: Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir

Two Frenchmen, Jean-Paul Sartre (1943-80); Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945-60) in a sense replicate the relation of Husserl and Heidegger, as Sartre is an intellectualist and M-P focuses on embodiment. An important clarification: M-P takes up the later Husserl's response to Heidegger (in Husserl's last work, the 1936 *Crisis*), in which Husserl turns to analyzing embodied subjectivity in a "life world" of everyday practical life. Simone de Beauvoir (1945-86) was unfairly dismissed as Sartre's girlfriend. Her *Second Sex* (1949), however renewed the study of gendered cultural meaning and in a way began "second wave" feminism.

Thus in 20th C phenomenology proper the basic distinction is whether the sense-making activity is bodily and practical, and hence only intellectual by abstraction (Heidegger, late Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir), or whether it's intellectual, and only practical or ethical by guidance of the intellect (early Husserl, Sartre).

Post-phenomenology: philosophy of radical difference

In any case, post-phenomenologists look for a "radical alterity": some disturbance in sense-making, something that refuses assimilation, something that always leaves a "remainder."

Although there are important ways in which the post-phenomenologists follow up on tendencies in Heidegger's work, it's relatively safe to say that the first important work in post-phenomenology is done by Emmanuel Levinas (1930-74), the first translator and commentator on Husserl in France. Levinas exposes the intellectualism of the early Husserl and develops a philosophy of ethical "infinity," the recoiling of intention in the face of the other that calls the freedom of the subject, so dear to Western philosophy, into question.

The second major figure here is Jacques Derrida (1962-present) who also begins with study of Husserl. He shows the implication of difference in Husserl's fundamental level of identity, that of subjective temporalization. Since temporalization is shown to be infected by difference, Derrida coins the term *differance*: timing and spacing, differing and deferring all at once. Later, Derrida will focus on the remainder or cinders left behind by the flaming march of spirit.

The third major figure is Luce Irigaray (1974-present), whose mimicry of Western philosophy reveals patriarchal biases in favor of identity and stability. She tries to develop a feminine imaginary based on duality and fluidity. Despite unfounded charges of essentialism and biologism, Irigaray works towards what she calls "an ethic of sexual difference."

Postmodernism

The term "postmodernism"

We began by noting that both wings of contemporary French philosophy, the post-phenomenological philosophy of radical difference we discussed above and the historical-libidinal materialism that will be our focus next week (and the rest of the semester) are termed "post-modern." Oddly enough, however, among the most well-known contemporary French philosophers, only Lyotard uses the name "postmodernism"; he tries to define a "Post-modern Condition" -- how techno-economic forces drove the West beyond the conditions that birthed "modern" the thought forms of Humanism, Methodological Individualism, Rationalism, Secular Moralism, and Progressivism.

Very often, as you must be aware, "postmodernism" is a pejorative in English-language polemics against French or French-inspired thought. It is sometimes used positively in replies to the same. As a pejorative, "post-modernism" refers to a "school of thought." The implication is that some intellectuals, perversely bored with reason and unwilling to use it to join the struggle for freedom of others not as privileged as they, frivolously embraced the rapid turnover and endless repetition of late, but still modern, capitalism, and named the age post-modern. In this way, they only mirror the fashion industry -- or more generally the culture industry -- they supposedly take ironic pleasure in analyzing, by endlessly seeking to be the hot new theorist, the one whose buzzwords everyone wants to have on their lips.

The question of post-modernism then is the specificity of our age (let's say post WWII): has capitalism moved far enough that the conceptual schemes of its early period 1600-1945 are now outdated and in need of replacement, or is the contemporary world just more of the same: a bit quicker and more wide-spread, but a world requiring only modifications of the basic concepts we've inherited? Here the question of novelty, fashion, tradition -- categories often used in aesthetic discussion -- are applied to conceptual schemes. What we'll next see is that one of the most radical challenges of post-modernist thought is to oppositional thinking, one that seeks to upset the "either - or" form of this opening: either radical change, or more of the same.

Difference as productive of identity

If there's any slogan that unites the two strands of contemporary French philosophy, as a single "postmodernism," it's that "difference produces identity." Since identities are what we are presented with in gender, race, class, nation, etc., postmodernism is diagnostic, suspicious, or critical. In its post-structuralist guise, it works back from what seems to be an identity to the historical material conditions of its production; in the post-phenomenological wing, to the logical tensions in "texts" (that is, de-centered networks of discursive and non-discursive practices) that try to legitimate identities as rational or natural. For example then, beneath the central term of humanism ("the human being"), post-structuralists would investigate the ways in which gender, race, class, etc. are **produced in material practices**: gender: clothes, hair, athletics; race in birth certificate categories, housing segregation, accent; class: free time, money security, inheritance; and **legitimated in discourse** by strategies that attempt to keep the privileged side pure and that render the hierarchy rational or natural.

Some key points of PoMo thinkers.

"Postmodernists"

Baudrillard: *Simulations*: three periods of simulacra (sign becoming more and more free of its referent). a) counterfeit: still referred to nature; b) production: (Benjamin: "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"): still some lingering relation to an original: millions of Picassos on college dorm walls. c) simulation or the hyperreal: meticulous reduplication of the real. when the original is just a mold for producing indefinite number of objects, then they're not

copies any more: DNA and digitality. Real as hyperreal: that which is always already reproduced: it only counts if it's been on TV. B's prescription: exacerbate the pre-modern symbolic exchange (potlatch) tendencies of modern consumerism. Infuriates people the most by seeming celebration of the "euphoria of simulation." Finality or end is not to have an end, but only to reproduce. Leads to charges of conformism, sell-out, etc.

Liotard: *Post-Modern Condition*. Kant after Marx: techno change (computer information age and the performativity principle of triumphant capitalism) forbids any ultimate reconciliation of epistemic, moral, and aesthetic discourse that Kant had hoped for in the paradoxical formulations of the *Critique of Judgment*, where the experience of natural beauty or sublimity, or natural organization, was to provide a clue as to the reconciliation of natural mechanism and moral freedom. L's prescription: recognize "differends" -- inability to have people heard in another discourse: e.g., explain exploitation in contract terms -- and foster discourses that provoke more discourse.

"French Feminists"

Cixous: "feminine writing": practical way to dislodge patriarchal structures in language and logic. mimicking the flows, *jouissance*, and associations that patriarchy assigns to femininity as opposed to the rigid hierarchies of "logic": cf. "hard science" (cf. Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* for Weimar Republic examples). *Écriture féminine*, as available to men, is not biologicistic or essentialist.

Irigaray: sort of deconstruction-but not precisely: more of a mimicry and pastiche--of history of philosophy with two aims: 1) to expose patriarchal fear of dependence on females and then 2) to provide positive symbolism for women. For example, in "Plato's Hystera" in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray takes the cave allegory in the *Republic* and shows how it hides womb as real origin of real male and female bodies. Elsewhere, Irigaray uses "two lips" to be positive about female "duplicity" or "lack" as opposed to male unity (phallus). 1 (phallus) vs. 0 (lack).

Kristeva: early work has two key terms: semiotic and symbolic. Semiotic flows/rhythms and symbolic articulation. Kristeva shows interweaving of the semiotic and symbolic: there is articulation even in seemingly semiotic womb (identity and difference) and flow/rhythm in seemingly symbolic language. Kristeva uses Plato's term *chôra* (from the *Timaeus*) to talk about the semiotic as condition of representation -- place before form - matter distinction necessary for representation -- which is itself then non-representable. However in talking about *chôra* there's a sort of "sublime" representation of the non-representable (the last is Lyotard talk, but applicable).

Deconstruction

Derrida: three fold method: a) diagnose opposition as hierarchy by showing forceful historical skewing; b) invert hierarchy by showing predicates of denigrated terms are essential to privileged term; c) reinscribe terms in "general text" that accounts for difference in field of force and signification. Shows "force" as limit of phenomenology, but can't propose ways to investigate the world of forces (in other words, can't articulate with contemporary science).

One of his most famous deconstructions is that of space and time: *différance* (differing: spatial distinction and deferring: temporal distinction) is the becoming-space of time (time cannot be pure interiority, as Augustine, Kant and Husserl all wanted in different ways) and becoming-time of space (spatial distinctions are produced by temporal synthesis). A synonym for *différance* is then "spacing" as differing / deferring, which "produces" identities on the level of objects, even space and time as forms of intuition.