

REFLECTION ON POSTMODERN NARRATIVES

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Abstract

Postmodernism has been one of the most famous intellectual movements in recent decades. It has its reflections in all spheres of social life. This paper seeks to understand and present to the reader the most prominent features of postmodernism, the reasons for which it appears and its consequences for the development of society. The paper also summarizes the most significant criticisms at the expense of postmodernism.

Keywords: *Postmodernism, Discourses, Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, Francis Lyotard*

Introduction

The period after the Second World War is often referred to as Reflective Modernity (Ulrich Beck), Liquid Modernity (Zygmunt Bauman) or postmodernism. Postmodernism refers to the emergence of a new socio-cultural configuration. In the sphere of the economy is distinguished the transition from an industrial economy to an economy that is based on the rapidly growing service sector. New technologies such as cable television, cell phones, the Internet have completely changed the way of life. It was associated with a new way of perceiving society. Social classes began to lose their importance, and citizens were less identified with them, at the expense of individualization and choice among the many lifestyles. Postmodern discourses emerged in social sciences. They completely criticized modern social sciences, theories, philosophical concepts, and laid the foundations of a new postmodern narratives.

Postmodern society is very different from the modern one. In the postmodern society, national states are deterritorialized and are increasingly losing their sovereignty, and preference is given to concepts such as human rights. There are supranational creations such as the European Union to which national states transfer part of their sovereignty. These

supranational creations, as well as national states, strive to generate loyalty to citizens and their identification with them. The economy is increasingly reliant on knowledge and skills, and less on repetitive tasks, as in the modern economy. Postmodern politics is increasingly talking about the end of ideology. The parties are no longer divided by ideological lines. Newly formed parties refuse to declare their position on traditional questions of modern politics, and the split in the political spectrum arises on issues such as Euroscepticism or Europhobia. In science, the enlightenment that imposed Cartesianism and rationalism is being questioned. Serious criticism of holistic theories is emerging and the development of discourses relying on independent codes begins. Instead of determinism that is characteristic of modern society, the postmodern is dominated by hermeneutics. The humanism established by Descartes is under serious criticism. The postmodern discourses see the social subject as a product of language, culture and unconsciousness. Modern morality is constantly being reassessed and put under new challenges. People are less identified with their nations, and increasingly reach their cosmopolitan identities. Some authors question normality as a disciplinary regime that imposes social power over social subjects.

As Daniel Bell noted, the postmodern undermines traditional values (Best and Kellner 1996: 24). Relativization of ethical principles, family values, work ethics, fragmentation, differentiation, flexible specialization, eclecticism are trends that dominate postmodernism (Pakulski 2006: 459). Cultural pluralism and hedonism prevail in the sphere of culture. Segments of the postmodern culture are pop art, multimedia installations, techno parties, etc. The characteristic of the postmodern culture is the huge number of styles in the field of music, film, fashion and the mixing of different styles, thus creating new ones. Postmodern culture is strongly influenced by the media. The media are so influential and present in the lives of individuals that the difference between reality and the media is blurred. The reality show and soap operas dominate the media. Different genres are mixed in television programmes. Entertainment shows comment politics. Political shows introduce elements of humor. The identity in the postmodern society becomes much more fluid. Individuals have a much greater degree of freedom to choose what they want to be. Modern identity depends to a large extent on family background and profession. Postmodern identities are built on the basis of consumption, more precisely based on the clothing that individuals have, the type of food they consume, the car they drive, the house they live in. If

we try to find out the most significant social features of postmodernism, they can be reduced to the following:

- Domination of media in society
- Consumerism
- Globalization
- Cultural diversity and hybridity
- Rapid social changes
- Fluid identity (Bazargani, Larsari 2015: 90)

If we simplify things, postmodernism began when industrial society reached its maximum. It has been upgraded to a modern society with certain technological innovations, which have developed specific values as hedonism, and created a new postmodern culture and social science that rely on discourses. Famous German sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, thought sociology should be critical toward the postmodernism. He considered that the postmodernism is partly a product of the changing social conditions, but it is also a product of the crisis of the intelligentsia (Pakulski 2006: 460).

The relations between postmodernism and sociology

The relations between sociology and postmodernism are very close and intertwined. Namely, the most prominent postmodernists in the field of social sciences in their vocation are sociologists. They write about postmodern society. Some sociologists even began to advocate the establishment of a new sociological sub-discipline postmodern sociology. Postmodern sociology basically has a critical overview of classical sociology and sees it as a product of modernism. The targets of postmodern critique are three key elements of classical sociology:

- Positivism, as the theoretical orientation advocated by Auguste Comte, the man who first used the term sociology. Positivism is the target of criticism of the postmodernists because he insisted that social sciences should be built on the example of the natural sciences, and use as much as possible quantitative methodology.

- Institutions and domination which are among the most frequently discussed topics of classical sociology. According to the postmodernists, dominance is a product of power, and power exists in every social relationship and is so diffused and dispersed in different social segments that its analysis seems unimportant.
- Meta narrations or holistic theories. These are the theories that explain the functioning of the whole society. Such theories are functionalism and the social conflict theory. Postmodernist criticize such theories and advocate for segmental discourses that are not interconnected and can even contradict one another (Best and Kellner 1996: 112).

Characteristics of postmodern discourses

The postmodernism was thought out and theorized by a series of sociologists and philosophers. The postmodern authors have serious objections to major theoretical and ideological narratives such as socialism, liberalism, conservatism, and so on. They develop discourses that are independent of each other. Postmodern discourses have several features:

- Subjectivity. The postmodernists reject the idea of the existence of objective reality. According to them, reality is a product of the subjective perception of each individual and the action that arises from it.
- Cultural relativism. Postmodernists point to the diversity of postmodern society. There are many interconnected communities in it. Each of them has its own values, norms, way of life, culture, their own truth. None of the many cultures is neither more nor less valuable than others.
- Social construction of the self. According to postmodernists the self is a social construct. Its development is influenced by the family, the place where the individual lives, the school, friends, etc. Postmodernists note that self is not unique, but it consists of several dimensions. They even point out that the individual has more personas (masks). They do not behave the same way when talking with a family member, a friend or an enemy.
- Interventionism. In the sphere of economics, the postmodernists reject the liberal stance of non-intervention of the state in the economy. On the contrary, postmodernists support state interventionism.

- Historicism. The key to historicism is the subjective perception of reality. Postmodernists are aware that the discourses they write are not an objective representation of reality, but the fruit of their ideological orientation, bias and imagination.

Postmodern discourses

Here we will examine the most famous postmodernists: Michel Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, and Francis Lyotard.

Michel Foucault is one of the leaders of postmodernism, although most authors place him among post-structuralists. He criticized liberal humanism by claiming that it developed evolved forms of power and knowledge that served as a new way of domination in society. Foucault rejected the idea of social progress. According to him, there is a continuity of disasters, ranging from the ordinary rod to the megaton bomb. The modern subject according to Foucault is the construct of domination. That's why he announced the "death of the subject".

The work of Foucault is divided into archeology and genealogy. The foundations of discourses developed by Foucault are laid in archeology, and genealogies argue about discourses in different social contexts. Foucault's social chronology makes distinction between the classical era (1660-1800), the modern era (1800 - 1950) and the postmodern era after the end of the Second World War. In the 19th century, human behavior falls under modern discursive regimes of power / knowledge. The task of enlightenment according to Foucault was the political power to master the reasoning. In modernistic theories, the knowledge and the truth are seen as neutral, objective and universal products of emancipation. For Foucault, however, they are part of the power / knowledge regimes. He therefore sees history as a non-evolutionary, fragmented area of unconnected knowledge. According to Foucault, power is dispersed, non-deterministic, heteromorphic, unsubject and productive (Best and Kellner 1996: 73). Unlike modernists who analyze centers of power and the way in which it is dispersed in society, Foucault analyzes power from the bottom up. According to Foucault, power exists in every relationship between two individuals and it crystallizes in the institutions. Unlike economic and legal, Foucault writes about a

completely different productive form of power, bio power. It is a disciplined form of power that includes the politics of the human body. According to Foucault, governments no longer deal with subjects or people, but with the population and its parameters as the rate of natural population growth, mortality rate, average life expectancy and poverty rate.

According to many experts for postmodernism, French sociologist Jean Baudrillard developed the most influential postmodern discourses. He distinguished between early modernism, which encompasses the period between the Renaissance and the industrial revolution, a mature modernism that begins with the industrial revolution and postmodernism, which is characterized by the increasing importance of the mass media in the social life. Baudrillard analyzed the relationship between subjects and objects and noted that in postmodernity subjects are not only attracted by objects, but fascinated by them to the extent that they control their perception, thought and behavior. The subject lost the battle for domination over the object. Therefore, the subject should reject his claims to acquire subjectivity. Baudrillard writes that in the postmodern period we face a new system of objects: new technologies, new values, a new understanding of everyday life, a new social order. Objects are multiplied, metastasized in society. According to Baudrillard in postmodern times more attention is paid to marginalized social groups like blacks and women. They do not run a policy that talks about major themes, but impose micro-political narratives that involve a revolution in lifestyle. Such a micropolitical narration is the identity politics.

According to Baudrillard, we live in a time of computerization, information processing, and the spreading of media that generates simulation codes that replace the productive organic approach to society. The time of mediated communication produces symbolic consumerism and compression of time and space. The modern era is dominated by mass production controlled by the bourgeoisie. The postmodern era is dominated by simulations and signs controlled by models, codes and cybernetics. The perception that the media creates for certain events is a simulation of those events. The difference between the simulation and the reality is imploding to the extent that the simulations become models that dictate reality. So the ideal of how a physician should look and behave is not our personal physician, but the physician from the television series. The ideal of how family relationships should look, are not the relations in one real family, but the relationships in the families from the television

screens. That's why Baudrillard speaks of hyper reality. Hyper reality basically blurs the difference between the real and the imaginary. Hyper reality means that simulations become more realistic than the reality itself, and that simulations become a criterion for reality.

The boundaries between images, information, entertainment, and politics in the postmodern are imploding, they are decaying. Many entertainment shows deal with politics; some of them have more politics than political shows. At the same time, many political shows introduce entertainment elements. Political campaigns are becoming more and more dependent on media advisors, public relations specialists, etc. The implosion spreads enough to cause social entropy.

The masses get bored with the constant surge of messages that lead them to buy, consume, and vote, and they become an indifferent, frowning, silent majority in which all the meanings implode and thus society collapses (Best and Kellner 1996: 172- 173).

Jean Francois Lyotard is one of the leading postmodernists. He paid special attention to the heterogeneity of discourses. According to Lyotard, the postmodern discourses should consist of language games. In spite of abstractions and rationality, Lyotard stands in defense of the senses and experience. After Plato, almost all philosophers and social scientists criticized the senses as an insufficient source of information. According to Lyotard, social sciences rely on binary systems, with one element of the binary system being underestimated. Lyotard stands in defense of the undermined element in the binary system.

In 1984, Lyotard published his most influential book *The Postmodern Condition*. In it he argues that in the postmodern society there is a crisis of representation at all levels. Old models of what it means to be a sociologist, artist, philosopher, scientist can no longer be applied. Lyotard paid special attention to the analysis of desires. According to him, eros and tanatos are always present in the desires. The discursive perception of desire is linked to an affirmative productive tendency and a negative rebellious tendency. Desires are structured according to the rules of the language. Art is nothing but the articulation of unconscious desires. The desire is limited and directed by oppressive forms like the economy and the state. Lyotard developed his own micro-politics of desire.

According to Lyotard, there is no difference between rationality and power. Rationality is often used through abstraction and dialectics to hide power. According to Lyotard, the postmodern narrative was unjustly underestimated and oppressed under the raid of the ratio

that disciplined and put under control the consciousness. Postmodern narratives do not have a value ideal. Lyotard criticized the consensus as a method of making decisions. According to him, a consensus imposes homogeneous criteria and the spread of universalism, rather than celebrating differences in society. All human knowledge relies on disagreement and problematization of existing paradigms.

The critique of postmodernism

Postmodernism is a very influential social direction and even movement in many segments of social life. It caused a serious debate on the social reality in which many of the postmodernists' arguments were accepted, but the postmodernism suffered serious criticism. Several authors like Roy D'Andrade, Ryan Bishop, Patricia M. Greensfield criticized the post-modern subjectivism. They considered that because of lack of objectivity in the approach and the emphasized political agenda, postmodernism cannot be used for developing a serious science and politic. Pauline Rosenau, in turn, criticizes the non-theoretical approach of the postmodernists and their inconsistency to criticize the postmodernism, as they do with the modernism (Bazargani, Larsari 2015: 95).

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