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Markus Termonen
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December 3, 2006

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Markus Termosen replies to article “Activist and postmodernity”,
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Do we need “great narratives”? To what extent does the (alleged) post-industrialization of society deconstruct the old models of subjectivity, action, theory and morality? Which useful aspects does the postmodern philosophy include? These are important questions, of course. In any case, I see some lacks in the article by Antti Rautiainen, lacks which simultaneously are connected to the value of the conclusions stated in the article. I will write about these lacks on a quite general level and not by dealing with singular sentences.

I’m of the opinion that the first lack concerns the thinness of the definition of “postmodernity”, which has the effect that nearly anything can be labeled “postmodern”. I think that the relevance of postmodernity (and its significance) alternates a bit depending on if we are talking about art, science, social structure or political philosophies. If we begin with philosophy, then in addition to the end of “modern narratives” (e.g. both socialist and capitalist “progression”) and ideologies, the significance of postmodernity is connected also to the questioning of the splitting and the dichotomy of “surface” and “foundation” (the splitting which appears in ques-

tions such as “what is human being really like?”) — in other words, questioning the truthfulness of this kind of “stratification”, but not questioning the fact that this dichotomy has had effects on the production of social models and “reality”. This does not mean “superficiality” (a usual misunderstanding, not necessarily included in the article by Rautiainen), but the comprehension of constructedness and stratification within the fields of power and a particular alertness in this context. E.g. the diversity of identities does not mean that identities are contingent and meaningless, but rather that postmodernity recognizes the possibilities of their circulation and nonfinality, their continuities and discontinuities, in addition to their constructedness, and analyzes them.

In this context I can’t avoid talking about “post-structuralism”, which is often mentioned in connection to postmodernity. It does not refer to an era after structures, to superficial lightness etc. but it refers to questioning that “structure” would one-sidedly define what “subject” is (his/her/its activity, interests, values), simultaneously as also “Cartesian” comprehension of the unity of subject and consciousness and the total autonomy of this unity are questioned. In other words, we are dealing with a certain “ontological” starting point, in which there is simultaneously included an understanding that the subject, which is unable of total self-government, is constructed within the fields of power, and also the emphasizing of subjectivity, desire and ruptures as central factors concerning the construction of these fields (in other words, multitude produces the Empire). We are dealing with a relationship between the internal and the external, in which external has not been restricted, and in which internal difference is always present.

(Concerning art, it can be said that “postmodernity” is self-conscious, and that it is playing with borders and connecting diverse elements intentionally. Often this means e.g. certain self-irony and the difficulty of “pigeon-holing”.)

The thinness of definition naturally causes also exact problems and not only problems on the general level. In some parts of

I don't know what Rautiainen states as answers or alternatives to these (supposed) arguments, but at least I don't think that it is desirable to wish for the return of the era of industrialism or national states, and I bet that the groups, which Rautiainen refers to, rather want to build another kind of content e.g. concerning globalization (which is clearly a postmodern phenomenon) than to bless its current model as inevitable (to specify this content is another story). I think this tells something also about the attitude towards the development of post-industrialization, but as an example I can bring up the analysis of immaterial labor produced by the antagonistic tradition, in which, shortly expressed, the form of antagonism between different productional powers is introduced in the context of the flexible and communicative model of work, and in which this progression is clearly not blessed in every relation.

I also want to still emphasize the significance of subjectivity and desire in postmodern theory: if "mass movements" and unity are declared dead, it is connected not only to the end of industrial society, but it is also expression of desires. Such expression of desires, which brings up the importance of things like quality of life, use of time, collective pleasure and communicationality of production. Subjectivity is not about inevitability, but rather, as has been said, about immanence.

the article there is e.g. a reflection of the assumption that in postmodernity or accorning to postmodernity everyone cares only about one's small communities or that the reduction of fights to locality is included in postmodernity. It may be so, that these kind of features have been included in the development of post-industrialization, e.g. in Great Britain during the Thatcher era, but what is the connection of these features and postmodern philosophy? It must be stressed that postmodern philosophy is materialist in the sense that it is "immanent", universally secular, and not in the sense of universal "transcendence", truthfulness and divineness. On this material level, the production reproducing societies and communities is taking place, just like the activity of subjects in general. In other words, the subjectivity of postmodern philosophy does not mean "extreme individualism" but the stressing of immanence, just like the emphasizing of the individuality of choices does not mean reducing them to everyone's own lifestyle, and just like emphasizing civil rights does not mean that the individual is the foundation of everything.

The second lack of the article is in my opinion that it does not specify the relationship between philosophical starting points and the development of "post-modernization" which has been realized. Even postmodern theory in itself consists of both the production of theoretical starting points and the interpretation of social transformations — in fact, some of the latter can be regarded as "recuperations" (reapproriations for the use of established power) of the former. E.g. the rhizomatic model of Deleuze and Guattari is not only a certain model of interaction, subjectivity etc. but it also has become real: the internet is a rhizome (several entrances and exits, passages which are neither determined nor controlled by a central power etc.), simultaneously as it has faced tendencies of control, privatization and centralization. The same can be said about the post-industrialization of production (in other words, e.g. its becoming more informational and communicational, which does not mean the disappearance of industry or production, just like indus-

trialization did not mean the vanishing of agriculture, but its industrialization): the destruction of the model of assembly line work (of course, not yet as an absolute transition) was a positive thing, getting rid of its forced dullness was excellent, but at the same time the immaterialization of labor has been used to flexibilization, to intensifying the production of surplus value, and to intensifying productivity and working time, according to the interests of the companies — and often by clothing this as "team work". There are also other examples: the death of ideologies has been recuperated into the end of history and into being without alternatives, diversity and the freedom of circulation have been recuperated into a command in which every ethnicity is welcome as long as it acts like has been ordered and as long as takes its own place etc.

No theory is absolutely responsible for its models of use, just like it is not completely free of this responsibility. Theory is something to be used, and not the image of truth. Sometimes it seems that the article by Rautiainen forgets these things.

As the third lack of the article I'll bring up its assumptions about the necessity of ideology as the precondition of morality and activity. The article refers to "moralizing" as a positive method, in other words as a somekind of forced enlightenment. It may be so, that great masses have been moved with demagogy, and that beliefs of unified and solid class arrangements and simple truths have produced enormous mobilizations, but I don't think that this gives reason to long for them. I don't think that "morality" is something that comes from above, but that it is an ethical process, which is constructed in interaction. Moral self-reflexivity is a part of postmodern philosophy, and therefore postmodern philosophy is not a negation of morality. On the other hand, activity does not require belief in universal (in the transcendental sense) legitimation, and one of the teachings of postmodern philosophy (in co-operation with feminism — a field whose rather fruitful relationship to postmodern philosophy is not mentioned in the article) is that "politics of situationality" is not an obstacle of resistance (I do not mean "situationality" in the rigid sense of "locality", but in the sense which includes circulation, even if not necessarily in a physical way). Another kind of perspective may even be harmful, because if one's own situationality (gender, ethnicity, age, wealth, sexuality etc.) is left unreflected and if communication with others is left unrealized, what else is politics then than rigid placing of models of activity and thinking from above. I do not think that Antti Rautiainen strives for exactly this kind of conception of politics, but on the other hand the article does not reveal which alternatives he sees for politics of situationality.

As the fourth lack I see the article's argument that "post-autonomes" (by the way, "the death of autonomy" refers also, firstly, to boredom about the fact that it was usual in the mainstream media to connect "autonomy" to breaking windows etc. and, secondly, to the weakness of the concept "autonomy", which I mentioned already in connection to "post-structuralism") would have a comprehension of "the inevitability of postmodernity". Does the author completely deny all the (sometimes contradictional) interpretations of social post-industrialization stated within the vast range of social theory? Is one supporting "the inevitability assumption" when one is taking these interpretations into consideration in one's activity? I do not understand this course of thinking, in which taking into consideration something that has occurred to some extent, is represented as considering it inevitable. I would understand this concept of "the inevitability assumption" much better if the article refered to a situation in which some person/group would regard as inevitable something that will happen in the future according to this person/group.

Well, of course it must be admitted that post-modernization or post-industrialization are processes, often differing temporally (sometimes "postmodernists" may forget this distemporality), so maybe Rautiainen refers in his critique to the (supposed) assumption of the "post-autonomes", that there are no alternatives to this process that has begun and that it can't be given a new direction.