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Reflections of/on the City : literature, space, and postmodernity

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Cover Page



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Statements accompanying the dissertation

Reflections of/on the City: Literature, Space, and Postmodernity

1.

“Postmodern” is not a dirty word.

2.

The same intellectual “move” underlies concepts like “postmodern,” “heterotopia,” “non-place,” and “posthuman.” Contrary to what their prefixes might lead one to presume, they all aim to overcome thinking in terms of oppositions. Instead, they are geared towards conceiving of multiple things at the same time – e.g. old and new, dominant and other, material and informational.

It is only through this postmodern intellectual move that new insights can come to light.

3.

It is important for literary studies to say things not only about literature, but also about what literature is about, which means saying things along with literature.

4.

Prevailing disciplinary demarcations in the humanities can be obstacles to new insights, and add to the marginalization of the humanities in broader academic and socio-political arenas. Inter-disciplinarity is the only way forward.

5.

An interdisciplinary approach of a topic like “the city” requires multidisciplinary training to really tie it all together.

6.

What the humanities can export to the social sciences are frameworks for mobilizing abstractions and concepts – e.g. how to understand “the symbolic,” or how to situate “otherness” in heterotopia.

7.

What the humanities can import from the social sciences are frameworks for anchoring abstractions and concepts in the world to which they relate – e.g. how to take into account economic, political, or material dimensions of space, the urban, and the social.

8.

Unmotivated assumptions (such as recourse to a “canon” of High Culture) that literature is “relevant to society” will not stand, especially in a time when the humanities have to justify their need for funding. One needs to demonstrate how literature as a way of thinking produces insights to connect, expand, or counterbalance other dominant modes of thought – e.g. those rooted in “grand narratives” like “economy,” “progress,” and “science.”

9.

The humanities do not “find” answers; their answers, questions, and problems all come from arguments, from ideas. Hence, scholars in the humanities should consider coming up with alternatives for the dominant terms used in academia and policy-making that are designed for positivist/empirical research, such as “research questions,” “hypotheses,” or even “conclusions.” The humanities might consider more actively rebranding themselves and changing their marketing strategy, in the parlance of our times.