

The Rendition Of Jack Solomon's "What's In A Name? The Ideology Of Cultural Classification" In The Aura Of Postmodernism

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Abstract:

The research paper titled "The Rendition of Jack Solomon's 'What's in a Name? The Ideology of Cultural Classification' in the Aura of Postmodernism" is based on the operational logic of demarcating domains or areas in relation to conceptualization. The study related to classification and categorization of different ideas, concepts and disciplines subverts the very basis of classification and categorization of these entities that is perceived as compartmentalization of ideas or concepts or else disciplines into rigid compartments without acknowledging the existence of the fuzzy areas or the overlapping domains in between these compartments. The study utilizes the critical theory of Postmodernism to investigate the taxonomic relationships based on "Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy" between different categories thereby questioning the rationality behind classification, categorization, and the creation of superordinate and hyponyms in relation to ideas, concepts, and disciplines. The traditional labels and categories lose relevance. In Postmodernism, a confusion or a lack of choice or a lack of structure or else a fragmentation of a structure brings into play the possibility of incessant choice thereby upholding infinite possibilities of permutations and combinations in relation to the formation of categories or of introducing overlaps among two or more categories. There is a transformation of the self with the introduction of "pick 'n' mix. It provides the opportunity to an entity to create its own identity and to bring greater pluralism in modern life. There are no absolutes. The predictability in relation to the systems is reduced. There is fluidity in the systems of signification, the boundaries of the systems are porous. Globalization has narrowed space and time, there has been a widespread technological intervention in the lives of the homo sapiens thereby making access to information easier and intensifying the search for truth which has increased the possibilities of permutations and combinations.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Fuzzy Logic, Taxonomic Relationships, Superordinates, Hyponyms, Permutations, Combinations, Pluralism, Absolutes, Fluidity, Globalization etcetera.

INTRODUCTION:

The research study titled "The Rendition of Jack Solomon's 'What's in a Name? The Ideology of Cultural Classification' in the Aura of Postmodernism" is based on the revolution that Postmodernism has brought in the domain of ideas in terms of classification and categorization of ideas, concepts, thought processes, disciplines, systems of signification etcetera thereby introducing fluidity, and porous boundaries.

POSTMODERNISM ON CLASSIFICATION OR CATEGORIZATION:

The chief tenet of Postmodernism is that it is operational on a fuzzy logic and prides itself on the overlapping of boundaries between ideas, concepts, thought processes, disciplines, systems of signification etcetera which in turn is responsible for doing away with rigid boundaries that basically demarcate ideas, concepts, thought processes, disciplines, systems of signification etcetera into water tight compartments. In Jack Solomon's "What's in a Name? The Ideology of Cultural Classification", a group of anthropologists is said to have conducted an IQ (Intelligence Quotient) test on a band of aboriginal tribesmen. The test is about grouping twenty different objects from four classes namely food, tools,

cooking utensils, and clothes. The test assumed that an intelligent individual with a higher IQ will group knives and forks under “cooking utensils” and apples and oranges under “foods” where the “cooking utensils” and “foods” are classes, that is, superordinates for the hyponyms knives and forks as well as apples and oranges respectively. This kind of a classification and categorization is perceived as an instance of the compartmentalization of ideas, concepts, thought processes or disciplines into rigid compartments without acknowledging the existence of the fuzzy areas or the overlapping domains in between these compartments or categories. In this test, the Aboriginal tribesmen chose a different classification or categorization thereby giving way to a different set of permutations and combinations that considered the fuzzy area or the overlap in between the compartments or the categories. They grouped the knives with the oranges thereby creating a new category based on utility as the knives would be used to cut the oranges. The Aboriginal tribesmen subverted the traditional labels and categories such as “cooking utensils” and “foods” and formed new labels and categories dependent on the relationship of utility between the articles. This classification and categorization also depicted the overlap between two independent classes namely “cooking utensils” and “foods”. The objects that were included in the different categories were regrouped based on the interrelations between them. The Aboriginal men remarked regarding the classification, “This is how a wise man would do this” (Solomon 78). On the other hand, the anthropologists who had administered the IQ test were exasperated and remarked regarding the tribesmen “how a damned fool would do it” (Solomon 78). The perspective of the anthropologists could usher in the functionality of Postcolonialism in the above-mentioned domain as the classical or traditional categorization or classification of the knives and forks as well as that of the oranges and apples projected a western cultural code in comparison to the grouping of the knives with the oranges that foregrounded an aboriginal cultural code. The first categorization manifests an abstract conception whereas the second categorization projects a concrete conception driven by utility. The regrouping of the articles by the Aboriginal tribesmen such as knives and oranges in the same group introduces a diagonal dimension between the superordinates “cooking utensils” and “foods” thereby making the verticality of Benjamin Bloom’s taxonomic relationship based on superordinates and hyponyms more diverse. The vertical relationship between superordinates and hyponyms can be made more diverse by introducing the forks in the same category as the knives and oranges and on the contrary introducing knives and forks in the category of the apples as apples can also be consumed using knives and forks. Thus, the aboriginal cultural code is not only driven by concreteness but also by fuzzy logic which is a multi-valued logic that allows for partial truths. The “cooking utensils” and the “foods” are general categories and the knives and forks or oranges and apples are specific objects but when specificity is introduced further such as carving knife and butter knife in the category of knives as well as oyster fork and lobster fork in the category of forks on the other hand Tangerine and Mandarin oranges as well as Fuji and Honeycrisp apples in the categories of oranges and apples.

The irrelevance of traditional labels and categories can be manifested in the instance of the mid-1970s, the Tennessee Valley Authority’s Plan to build a dam on the Little Tennessee River that flows through Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee, U.S.A. was stopped as it would have threatened the survival of various species such as snail darters, a kind of fish, and the Anthony’s River snail (*Athearnia anthonyi*), a type of mollusc. The supporters of Tellico project argued that the dam could be built as the snail darter was not an endangered species since there are many darter species that are related to each other in the same region. The opponents to the construction of the dam stated that the snail darter was a unique species that was irreplaceable and it was a significant component of the biological diversity on the planet Earth. It had been covered by the Endangered Species Act of 1973. The group that supported the construction of the dam did not acknowledge the exclusivity of a particular species of the snail darter and saw all the darters to be the same thereby adopting the general approach. The members of this group did not understand the idea of sustainable growth as in order to progress the construction of the dam is necessary but the extinction of a particular species of snail darters is to be prevented so that the ecological balance does not get altered. The rejection of the traditional labels and categories becomes evident here as the general categorization of all the species of darters is rejected and the exclusivity of each species of

the darters was taken into consideration so that the minute details of each species of the darters will create several species of them belonging to different independent categories (Solomon 82).

In Postmodernism, a confusion or a lack of choice or a lack of structure or else a fragmentation of a structure brings into play the possibility of incessant choice thereby upholding infinite possibilities of permutations and combinations in relation to the formation of categories or of introducing overlaps among two or more categories. This aspect is highlighted in the instance of a retired Harvard professor who was persuaded by his wife to take up the hobby of birdwatching against his indolent inclinations. He created four basic classes of birds namely “crows”, “gull and robins”, “small brown birds” and “other”. It simplified the act of classification and the appearance of a bird like a scarlet ibis was tucked into the class of “other” thereby providing infinite possibilities of permutations and combinations in relation to the formation of categories or of introducing overlaps among two or more categories (Solomon 81). The category of the “other” in relation to birds in this case is vast and expansive as the number of types of birds in this category are more.

In the repertoire of Postmodern thoughts, there is a transformation of the self with the introduction of “pick ‘n’ mix”. It provides the opportunity to an entity to create its own identity and to bring greater pluralism in modern life. Jewish scholars have struggled for centuries to derive the definition of a Jew in the diaspora so they have devised that any child of Jewish parents is a Jew but so too is a child of mixed parentage if his or her mother is a Jew. The child of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother is not considered to be a Jew. Thus, the creation of a Jewish identity is based on the introduction of “pick ‘n’ mix” as the Jewish identity includes those who have both parents as Jews and those who have the mother as a Jew but not those who only have the father as a Jew. It provides an opportunity to the community of Jews to create its own identity and also to bring about pluralism in modern life by allowing the children of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father to be called a Jew (Solomon 84).

Postmodernism lacks absolutes as there are many ways to categorize objects and images depending on the individual or the cultural interests of one who creates the classification. Thus, there are no absolutes. A horse can be classified in a number of ways that may not necessarily be biological. A horse is seen as an oversized, short-eared donkey. The breeders may breed horses and donkeys that would drive down the value of horseflesh. Therefore, a horse may be in the category of an Equidae which is a family that also includes zebras, asses, mules and hinny, a hybrid animal which is the offspring of a male horse and a female donkey so there are no absolutes in terms of classification or categorization. The fact that the horses may end up on the dinner plate like cattle because they are herbivores like cattle, and herbivores are a group of animals that are generally classed as edible within the terms of our culinary code basically prove the fact that the categories are not absolute (Solomon 82-83).

The Postmodern thought reduces the predictability in terms of the systems as they are characterized by fluidity, major overlaps and no absolutes. William Faulkner (1897-1962) in his stories depict the sensitivity of the southern part of U.S.A. towards classificatory challenges created by racial admixture. In *Absalom Absalom!* (1936), Charles Bon, the hero, has a fair-skinned mistress who is one-eighth Black by descent hence an “octoroon”, a case of racial mixture between white and black but that slim one-eighth is enough to cast her among the slaves. The novel ends with Bon who is an officer in the Confederate Army during the American Civil War being murdered by his all white half-brother after he comes to know that Bon has a trace of “black blood” in his veins despite Bon being in the Confederate Army and also being pro-slavery. His efforts to maintain slavery as an institution was not recognized. In America, a drop of black blood is enough to make an individual like Bon black. It is true not only in fiction but also in real life thereby destroying the predictability of the systems (Solomon 85).

Postmodernism characterizes the systems of signification with a kind of fluidity and the boundaries of these systems are porous. Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) before commencing the extermination of the European Jewry ordered the Nazi biologists to work on “proving” the “natural” racial inferiority of the Jews. He commanded the others to come up with a definition of a Jew. It was decided that an individual who had one Jewish grandparent was a Jew regardless of his or her actual religion or parentage. It was close to the taxonomic myth that Jews are not humans at all turning them into cattle in order to boil down human beings into soap which was first sanctioned by ideologically motivated biologists and

genealogists who shifted at will the crucial boundary between the human and the non-human (Solomon 83-84).

Globalization has narrowed space and time, there has been a widespread technological intervention in the lives of the homo sapiens thereby making access to information easier and intensifying the search for truth which has increased the possibilities of permutations and combinations. In U. S. A., during the Reagan administration, the tomato ketchup was reclassified as a “vegetable” although it was initially classified as a “condiment” in order to save money on a school lunch program. The tomato ketchup is made from tomatoes which is considered to be a “fruit” as well. Thus, with the narrowing of space and time due to globalization and the widespread technological intervention in the lives of the homo sapiens, accessing information is easier and the search for truth is more intense. It has increased the possibilities of permutations and combinations because of which tomato ketchup not only qualifies as a “vegetable”, a “condiment”, a “fruit”, but also as a “sauce” and a “food”. The tomato ketchup is a common element that can be put within so many categories thereby providing the opportunities for “n” number of permutations and combinations.

CONCLUSION:

The postmodern thought recognizes and acknowledges the overlaps between different domains, ideas, concepts, thought processes, systems of signification, identities etcetera with porous boundaries providing scope for fluidity between different domains and subverts the creation of rigid domains that are totally autonomous and isolated with rigid boundaries. The fluidity in the systems of signification make them variant or diverse displaying hybridity. The same idea is being used in the disciplines of Genetics, Genetic Engineering to treat congenital diseases and increase crop yields. This idea has been instrumental in the creation of hybrid disciplines such as Biochemistry, Astrophysics and Bioinformatics as these disciplines are customized to suit the needs of the current times and the epistemological ground of these disciplines has been substantiated by two or more traditional disciplines. Thus, today’s disciplines exist as a nebula and their boundaries cannot be distinguished or demarcated distinctly because the in-depth interrelations that are found among them make them a part of one whole mass of disciplines with porous boundaries. In Philosophy, such kind of a phenomenon is evident in the ideology of post-nationalism that has its manifestation in global politics. In Sociology, the classless societies with porous boundaries are instances of such kind of a nebula and social mobility characterizing stratified social systems with various classes introduce fluidity in the classes to make it possible. In trade, commerce and administration of business, the following of best practices across the globe is an instance of fluidity among different systems. The global culture is characterized by similar kinds of fluid paradigms. The various permutations and combinations dilute the integrity of the systems of signification which are not isolated entities anymore because of their porous boundaries. In Literary Criticism, the epistemology is rational as a result of it being primarily substantiated by the traditional disciplines of Philosophy and Psychology. In the indigenous cultures, the fluidity of the systems of signification is recognized and acknowledged since time immemorial thereby yielding ground to Postcolonialism.

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