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Post Structuralism, Deconstruction and Post Modernism



9.1 Post Modernism

This relates to a complex set of reactions to modern philosophy and its presuppositions, as opposed to the kind of agreement on substantive doctrines or philosophical questions that often characterizes a philosophical movement. Post modern philosophy typically opposes fundamentalism, essentialism, and realism. Examples are Foucault, Derrida, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Lyotard argue that the presuppositions of philosophical modernism emerge out of a disposition whose antecedent, unarticulated beliefs are already postmodern.

Postmodern philosophy is therefore usefully regarded as a complex cluster concept that includes the following elements.

- Anti (or post) epistemological standpoint.
- Anti essentialism.
- Anti realism.
- Anti fundamentalism.
- Opposition to transcendental arguments.
- Transcendental standpoints.
- Rejection of the picture of knowledge as accurate representation.
- Rejection of truth as correspondence to reality.
- Rejection of the very idea of canonical descriptions rejection of final vocabularies that is rejection of principles, distinctions, and descriptions

that are thought to be unconditionally building for all times, persons, and places.

- And a suspicion of grand narratives, meta narratives of sort perhaps best issues treated by dialectical materialism.
- Post modern philosophy is “against” it opposes characterizing this means of opinion as relativism, skepticism, or ritualism and it rejects as “the metaphysics of presence” the transitional putatively impossible dream of a complete unique, and closed explanatory system, an explanatory system typically fueled by binary oppositions.

On the positive side of post modernism are the following themes:

- Its critique of the notion of the neutrality and sovereignty of reason including instance on its pervasively gendered, historical and ethnocentric character.
- Its concept of the social construction of word world mappings.
- Its tendency to embrace historicism.
- Its critique of the ultimate status of a contrast btw epistemology on the one hand, and the sociology of knowledge on the other.
- Its dissolution of the notion of the antonymous, rational subject.
- Its instance on the antifactual status of divisions of labor in knowledge acquisition and production.
- Its ambivalence about enlightenment and its ideology.

- In every other respect, post modernism is a post structuralist discourse. It gives us fragments where there was wholeness, change fragments where there was stasis, open-endedness and pastiche where we once had formal closure and underlying rations of depth.
- Post misdeterminism gives us the ineluctability of difference rather than the search for sameness in a structured world.
- Post modernism is a hydra dreaded monster and a chameleon, impossible to characterize without entering into life threatening contradictions.
- It crops up everywhere in every kind of discourse and practice.
- According to Richard Osborne (1987) the unifying project of post modernism is contrasting the dominant definition of things, the consensus whether political or academic and interrupting the flow of apparent relatives.
- Post modernism could be summed up as a belief that large scale ideas and political philosophers are intermittently dangerous (the terror of totality).
- F. R. Ankersmit recommended that historians should adopt postmodernism perspective as the new superior form of understanding of their discipline.

Factors featured associated with the theory or idea of post modernism according to F. R. Ankersmit.

1. It is an inevitable stage of present day culture and a break with the past that owing to the conditions of contemporary society cannot be withstood. Thus, a strong sense of fatality and the irresistible hovers over the notion.

2. It carries with it strong connotation of decline, exhaustion, and of being at the end rather than the commencement of an era.
3. Its hostility to humanism, it rejects humanism as an outmoded relic and illusion of bourgeois ideology the illusion of individuals creating their history through their free activity, which it sees as merely a cover for bourgeois societies oppression of when the working class non whites sexual deviants and colonized natives.

In the cultural domain as a whole, it implies a total erasure of the distinction and elite culture and mass popular culture largely shaped and dominated by advertising and the commercial media, a distinction that both modernism and humanism accepted as axiomatic.

There has never been a single and widely accepted definition of post-modernization whereas Lyotard 1995 defines it as a critique of metanarratives, Rorty as quoted in Sangren 1988:419 sees it as a disavowal of epistemology. While Seidman 1995:2 conceives postmodernism as hybridization of knowledge fictions and words 1994:482 call it skepticism anti philosophy.

These definitions imply postmodernism as methodology, which has sometimes been equated with deconstruction. The post colonial is another theory that has epistemological and methodological affinity to postmodernism. Indeed the world of knowledge and its productions has become a world of post and isms.

The end of the Second World War spanned crisis in western culture and civilization that led to the questioning of enlightenment as the foundation of western knowledge. The crisis included the collapse of western global hegemony, the fragmentation of the world system, the shift and or est. of new centers of capital accumulation. These entire crisis led westerner's disillusionment with modernism.

Since 1970s some western scholars sought new ways of explaining the new reality, the post modern reality.

1. Postmodernism possesses methodological value because of its advocacy of linguistic and textual analysis of texts and instance that many meanings can be derived from the different interpretation of texts.
2. Post modernist methodology is usefulness inheres in opening up new ways of interpreting the world around us.
3. Research in Africa and particularly Kenya should use postmodernist methodology in combination.
4. Postmodernism is being virtue eclectic and multi and inter disciplinary.
5. In the case of Africa and particularly Kenya, postmodernism calls for more oral, archeological and archival and other research for purposes of providing more published texts.

9.2 Michael Foucault (1926-1984)

9.2.1 The Archaeology and Power Knowledge

He was born in Poitiers, France. He studied philosophy at the *ecole normale superieure* and subsequently undertook research in psychology. He was appointed in 1964 to a professorship in philosophy at university of Clermont Ferrand. In 1970, he became professor of the history systems of thought, at the college de France a title of his own contrivance designed to distinguish his work from conventional history of ideas. Foucault was a controversial and deliberately provocative thinker, sometimes abrasive and arrogant; whose ideas offered a fundamental challenge to prevailing intellectual activity.

It is not altogether surprising therefore that his work has met with exasperation and even ridicule as well as acclaim and sometimes reverence. His writing cannot be placed within conventional disciplinary categories indeed to attempt to do so would be contrary to the fundamental nature of occults projects.

In so far as he wrote histories, they were histories of the present attempts to chart the emergence and character of modern forms of rationality, to explore the ways received truths in the human sciences have become established historically. As Foucault's work developed the key to this undertaking became increasingly the relationship between knowledge and power.

9.2.2 Power of Knowledge

Foucault's conception of power is not that conventionally encountered in historical or sociological writings. He conceived power not as something exerted from above by a sovereign, a state, or a dominion class, but rather as something that permeates society through the linguistic conventions and the conceptual categories which shape and constrain our existence.

His most persuasive and accessible presentation of these ideas was in his studies of therapeutic and coercive institutions such as the asylum and the prison. But institutions of this sort demand for Foucault, an epiphenomenon of a wider conceptual and semantic coercion.

All knowledge all assertions of truth, however they might be embodied institutionally represented, for Foucault, claims, to power and routes to power. His project was not to establish the truth or otherwise of particular forms of knowledge but to consider them as strategies to ask what they did. Foucault's histories are therefore, histories without linear development, evolution or progress. He acknowledges that the definitions and discourages through which

phenomena such as criminality or madness or sexuality are constituted have undergone radical and important historical shifts but however they have been transformed, they remain stratifies of power and coercion.

His histories are also histories without agency the coercive power he explores is certainly not in any straight forward sense exercised by a ruling individual group or class. Indeed, Foucault offers no general theory of power or of historical change at all. There are no overarching conclusions.

Rather he offers a method and set of questions, both of which are worked out in the contest of particular studies. Inevitably Foucault's work evoked enormous hostility he was attacked for the manifest empirical short comings of his histories, for their moral relativism (particularly their questioning of humanistic values) for their attacks on scientific objectivity and for their failures to grapple with economic power and the nature of the modern state. He is a difficult and at times impenetrable writer. But his insights into the relationship btw knowledge and power are challenging and important.

Whether they can be successfully incorporated into the conventional practice of history is more doubtful.