

INSTITUALIZING FEMINISM IN POSTMODERN: A STUDY

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Abstract:

Feminism is commonly used to refer to all those who seeks, no matter on what grounds, to end women's oppression. Feminism can be seen as a wide and changing movement, seeking in various ways to raise woman's social status (V. Ranthll 8). Feminism is an "...intellectual tool enabling us to understand how preconceptions of masculine and feminine behavior have shaped our lives and disadvantaged women" (K.C. Figs 217). The above definitions of feminism merely affirm the need for women's 'freedom' and 'self-determination', to rid society of sexism and male domination. The debate of place of feminism in postmodern condition should be discussed. According to some critics, postmodernism poses threat to feminism whereas for some critics, postmodernism offers new approach to the study of feminism. The present research paper attempts to study institualizing feminism in postmodern.

Key Words: *Postmodern, feminism, oppression, self-determination.*

The problems facing straightforward definitions of feminism resurface when attempting to describe postmodern theory, indeed, one strand of postmodern thought is the incredulity towards definitions themselves. Like feminism, it too has a fragmented history and a diverse set of theories and advocates. As before, there is the danger of presenting a caricature of postmodern arguments. Postmodern theory is defined by different writers in different ways. For example, Richard Rorty argues in *Remarks on Deconstruction and Pragmatism* trying to define postmodernism is rather like "attempting to find something common to Michael Graves' building... Salman Rushdie's novels, Ashberry's poems, various sorts of popular music and the writings of Heidegger and Derrida". (13) Lyon indicates this general problem at the beginning of his study by asking "[i]s postmodernity an idea, a cultural experience, a social condition or perhaps a combination of all three" (4) as do Best and Kellner who believe that whilst postmodernism attacks modern philosophy "...there is no unified postmodern theory or even a coherent set of positions... [and so] we are left with an under theorized notion of postmodernism"(1).

The feminism practiced, theorized, and lived by many women today is set against the vicissitudes of a transforming postmodernity- as a set of practices, an arena of theory, and a mode of life. This may not be a comfortable dwelling place, but it does make up a world, a form of life with which feminism necessarily conjures. The animating idea of this issue is that postmodernism is, indeed, a name for the way we live now, and it needs to be taken account of, put into practice, and even contested within feminist discourses as a way of coming to terms with our lived situations. This is not to say that postmodernity is to be celebrated unquestioningly; if it truly is a rubric covering the conditions of theory and practice in our time, this demands resistance at least as much as an empowering embrace. How feminism will transform postmodernism, as well as how postmodernism alters feminism, are the pressing questions of this moment.

As theoretical discourses, both feminism and postmodernism are porous, capacious; equally, they are discourses on the move, ready to leap over borders and confound boundaries. Their intersection in this issue is meant both to provide active and passive positions for each discourse vis-a-vis the other and to show that binary does not begin to exhaust the positionalities it is possible to invent in the name of

feminism and postmodernism.

Feminism premised on material conditions, on the social construction of gender, and on an understanding of the gender hierarchy as relational and multiple and never in itself simply exhaustive. This is not a matter of formulating an arena of female difference or differences; rather than articulating an essential “difference,” or a woman’s “text” or “voice,” the emphasis falls on considering how feminist issues never arrive single-handedly-materialist feminism attempts to move beyond the additive logic of female differences to a grounded, but volatile, understanding of gender in relation to myriad other determinations. Such an understanding includes the possibility that in given instances gender is not the bedrock oppression.

Postmodernism so conceived has a material situation, what David Harvey calls “the condition of postmodernity,” a situation, of course, open to debate and reconceptualize but still to be seen in relation to concrete phenomena of material, social, economic, and cultural life. Postmodernism is the best umbrella term for the cultural, social, and theoretical dimensions of our period.

Feminist postmodernism once read as an oxymoron, and postmodern feminism still has an uncertain valence. Craig Owens wrote in his article *The Discourse of Others* complains of the absence of feminist theory per se within postmodernism, while feminist practices, in the form of art, mass culture, and politics, were so evident and prominent within it. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson wrote a memorable essay framing the “encounter between feminism and postmodernism,” making it clear that feminism has many reasons to be wary of the encounter but also has many things to gain in a theoretical sense. This present issue is encouraged by the task of reading each discourse through the lens of the other, putting each term under the pressure of a conjunction across disciplinary and political lines. Feminist theory and practice require an understanding of the transformations of postmodernity, while a postmodern politics requires feminism as a cutting edge of its critique.

A postmodern feminism can analyze the gendering of representations into canonical and non-canonical divisions exemplifying sexual difference, as Claire Detels incisively shows: Categories of postmodern theory give feminism a foothold in the solidly masculinist terrain of music theory, where postmodernity makes the case for the blurring of canon boundaries further interrogated by feminist questions of value and hierarchy. Postmodern feminism exhibits itself also as a style of commentary, aesthetics of analysis capable of using postmodern theory as a feminist power tool. Kathryn Bond Stockton’s essay provides a surprising postmodern encounter between Victorian theories of the body and an Irigarayan materialist spirituality wherein materialist feminism is invigorated by taking to the dance floor with postmodern discourses to provide a revived body politics. In all these instances, postmodernism is a strategic form for feminist writing, as well as for analysis.

Postmodernism has entered the feminist legal realm of equality, rights, and political identity in particularly charged ways in recent years. Mary Poovey exhibits the postmodern technological basis underpinning our images of masculinity and femininity by investigating the film *Terminator 2* with its real female cyborg. Andrew Ross offers a postmodern spin on the cultural politics of male bonding and its unexpected bridge to the environmental movement’s feminist wing, and the polyglot, and surprising nature, of postmodern politics, legalisms, and their strange affinities. As Andrew Ross has argued elsewhere, along with Donna Haraway, Meaghan Morris, and other critics, postmodernism must be specifically confronted as a congeries of technological and informational forms transforming both the objects and the subjects of knowledge. A feminist postmodernism will understand the mediated nature of knowledge and representation, as well as the altered political subject produced by these mediations.

Both postmodern theory and feminist theory are rooted in longstanding philosophical debates, with important political effects. The philosophical categories Simone de Beauvoir deployed as vital aspects of feminist praxis are disentangled by Toril Moi in “Ambiguity and Alienation” in *The Second Sex*;

this salient feminist history is ready for a second, postmodern reading to highlight its relevance to contemporary debates. Linda Nicholson engages the philosophical constraints of a feminist political theory in *Feminism and the Politics of Postmodernism*, taking up polemical questions within feminist practice as it engages the sometimes hostile discourse of postmodernity.

Feminism and postmodernism urgently converge in a need to theorize systemic relations and a global politics. A combination of feminism and postmodernism gives birth to global feminist theory. Both are complementary to each other and none replace or alter by the other.

References:

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