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TWO REALMS AND A JOKE: BISOCIATION THEORIES OF JOKING

I will begin by giving my own definition of the joke (see also Johnson, 1975), the theoretical perspective from which this article is written:

(1) The so-called joke is the conceptualization of a process of alignment whereby the adherents of a particular conceptual system place themselves in a situation of hierarchical superiority over the object to which they refer.

(2) That the logical capability to generate jokes as a form of contained anti-structure is an inherent quality of any classificatory system.

(3) Once it is recognized that the joke is the product of the application of a given conceptual system, then it becomes apparent that the expression 'joke' refers only to a type of ideologically generated classification by which a part is defined by the containing premises of the encompassing conceptual schema.

(4) Investigation of such hierarchical alignments reveals that the joke process as involving a class of visible events may be described in many different folk idioms. This process whereby classificatory conflict created by social transaction is conceptually contained does reveal the self-reifying nature of conceptual systems when used as paradigms of explanation.

(5) It becomes apparent that to study the joke as a process of hierarchical alignment requires information about the total system in which the justifying conceptual system is engaged. The joke process is inextricably merged with the containing conceptual system in the total socio-economic situation which both generates and invokes them.

A joke might be the concretization of a process of hierarchical alignment, but such a process does not necessarily entail the co-occurrence of a joke.

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a critical exposition of theories which interpret the joke as a mediation, or bisociation, occurring between two realms of meaning. The the-