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Session: Critical Theory: Some Basics

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This presentation came out of a suggestion on the #critlib lightning talk proposals. An introduction to critical theory being such a big topic, it was moved to the beginning of the day and given an hour for discussion. The primary theorists to know are numerous!

Critical Theory encompasses social theory + literary criticism = Herkimer's goal of liberating the human soul from enslavement (ie, capitalism)

The goal of critical theory is to change your mode of thinking, approach to reading.

This is a list of links I consulted as I made these slides:


https://www.zotero.org/groups/critlib


...
Critical Theory - some basics

Key paradigms of structuralism include that there are overarching structures in society that form our identity define our experiences. Categories like male, female, race, class, gender, nation state, etc.

History of Critical Theory // Frankfurt School //
MARX HABERMAS
ADORNO
GRAMSCI
Horkheimer
Levi-Strauss

Structuralism

- Our experiences are in relation to something bigger than us
- Systemic structures regulate meaning, producing signs

Key paradigms of structuralism include that there are overarching structures in society that form our identity define our experiences. Categories like male, female, race, class, gender, nation state, etc.
May 1968 and Stuart Hall’s Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies …. brought in Marxism to the critical analysis of the 1970s political movements, producing an international intellectual pursuit.

key paradigms:
not only is identity socially constructed: race, gender, nationality, ability, class, but identity/class are a conglomeration of privilege and access that facilitates capitalism

the canon is not stable nor universal

prison industrial complex

self-reflection and positionality

conquest, slavery, genocide = colonialism; facilitates capitalism

BARTHES
DERRIDA
FOUCAULT…
Signs & Semiotics

• can signify multiple meanings
• so, signs can just point to other signs.... deferment

and then it gets messy.... Deconstruction... PostModernism
"c'est ne pas une pipe"

Not only are supposed binaries reductive and they don't represent lived experiences, but they are violent in that they erase identity, subvert resistance and political empowerment, and repress jouissance.

- "Violent Hierarchies": black/white, male/female, teacher/student
- Deconstructing the meanings of seemingly paired signs exposes complex human experience
Time: the 4th Dimension

• Signs and meanings shift in cultural context
• Our experiences are not the same as those before or after us, nor are they universal

Critiquing society and contemporary culture; understanding and excavating the historical basis of institutional power.

Power: who has it? what is it? how do we define it?

Hegemony vs. Hierarchy
Agency
Globalization
Consumerism
Lyotard
Donna Haraway
Baudrillard

reality vs. representation (simulacrum)

Hyper reality exists as the representation of signs, pointing and signifying something that they may not appear to be, or more so.
Institutional power, structural power, and technology facilitate deep thinking about access and subjectivity, surveillance and agency.

Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire
John Dewey & Constructivism
Bloom’s Taxonomy
bell hooks
Gender Performativity: we construct gender by performing it.

Heteronormativity: Rich + Sedgewick
BUTLER
HALBERSTAM
BORNSTEIN
IRIGARAY
LORDE
Identity is not fixed and our gender performance, and sexual assignment do not determine who we are, nor who we love. Queerness as a deviant, perverse and oppositional space in expansive contrast to heteronormativity and compulsory heterosexuality... even an analogous compulsory homosexuality that is based in ‘same’ness. In a post-AIDS 1990s, Queer Theory reenvisioned queerness as in conversation with representations of death and dying, and identity as deeply ambivalent.

Halperin
Berlant
Warner
de Lauretis
Munoz
Critical Race theory starts from the basis that we live in a white supremacist society. This is a picture of a statue of Thomas Jefferson at the Library of Congress, standing in front of all of the names of people who were enslaved at his slave camp/plantation Monticello. His personal library formed the initial collection that grew into our current library of congress, and the humanist curiosity in his collection lead to the LOC organizational schema. This entire system of knowledge organization is based on the collected knowledge of a slave owner. White privilege seeps into all the overarching structures that govern society.

WEB DuBois
Derrick Bell
Patricia Hill Collins
BAHBA
HALL
Paul GILROY's Black Atlantic
Toni MORRISON's Playing in the Dark
Moraga & Anzaldua: This Bridge Called My Back
barbara smith
Phillip DeLoria's Playing Indian
Whiteness Studies: Dyer
Hazel Carby…
Intersectionality: Race + Class + Gender

A marxist feminist approach that posits that oppression happens at the intersection of society's structures (race, class, gender). Coined by Crenshaw.

Many modes of cultural studies emerged from intersectional studies:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_studies#Related_authors
"Our goals are to engage in discussion about critical perspectives on library practice. Recognizing that we all work under regimes of white supremacy, capitalism, and a range of structural inequalities, how can our work as librarians intervene in and disrupt those systems?"