

INTERSECTIONAL ACTIVISM, INFOSESSION, 6/14/15

throughout this course we will explore the histories of critical language, which sometimes is not in line with our radical sensibilities, and expand upon such shorthand terms [safer spaces, intersectionality, privilege, appropriation etc] to understand these words and the cultural condition in which they came into use.

note: neither language nor the class take the place of political organizing.

intersectionality comes out of critical race theory, which stems from critical legal theory, as an intervention to address civil rights and social justice through attending power asymmetries within the legal system. recognizing an erasure in the framing of laws, intersectionality was posed as a way to address how women of color could not speak towards their discriminations on the basis of race *and gender*. to bring this language into law would pose a radical//unprecedented claim in that it would open the floodgates to an abundance of compound discrimination cases [queer, ableism, etc], which could not be recognized through single-issue analysis.

kimberly crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality, contends that looking at the intersections of identity markers [the black woman being the invisible//hyper-invisible image of this] can illuminate simultaneous oppressions ignored under the conditions of law. How can anti-sexism overlook white supremacy, or anti-racism overlook patriarchy?

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questions of the class going forward:

*how do we *do* intersectionality?*

rather than 'doing' intersectionality, we can talk about intersectional failures. intersectionality is not always about socio-political practice, but finding where this discourse can help us from ignoring systemic//interlocking oppressions [e.g. in domestic violence movement, gay rights movement, etc].

how can the law help//hinder us?

dean spade's writing on the failure of hate crime legislation//inclusivity to address underlying problems of the criminal justice system.

what kinds of terms do we use in activism and what kinds of histories do they have?

there's no reason to dismiss a term once it has been institutionalized. we can bolster and reclaim these words when we understand their histories.

what are the limits of identity-based organizing?

~ review of syllabus ~

~ q&a ~

highlight: this class allows for discussion of text in tandem with personal experience, but when addressing the latter please do not phrase your feelings and experience to represent a demographic [ie. "as a _____ i feel..."]. intersectionality allows us to speak through or within a subject position without speaking for a collective.

SESSION ONE, 6/21/15, HOOKS, CRENSHAW, LORDE

one of the reasons for beginning an exploration of intersectionality with readings from crenshaw, hooks, and lorde is that intersectionality is an intervention staged through black feminist thought. all of these women are//were in a unique position to speak towards the invisible hyper-visibility of marginality. we start here to not smudge the work of black feminism.

many of these readings manifested in the 1980s to address interlocking oppression and the issues that single-issue organizing failed to recognize.

intersectionality is not a program, but an opening to recognize institutional failures.

for whom is self-care politically urgent?

how do we perform care under linked conditions of white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, capitalism?

~COMBAHEE RIVER COLLECTIVE STATEMENT~

- the expansion of feminist principle(s) is made to give voice to those marginalized by single-issue organizing.
- if “the personal is political” then the kinds of interventions that we need to make depend on how the personal is being defined. single-issue organizing expresses the desire to politicize the personal without recognizing the distinction between what constitutes personal life.
- class analysis and critical consciousness are crucial to this collective statement.
- coalition building needs to happen both within racial categories and throughout class, color, and gender lines.
- we need to give space for those in undervalued positions to be represented.

~KIMBERLE CRENSHAW~

- one version of anti-essentialism is that since all categories are socially constructed we can't recognize categories such as black, female, etc , but since these categories are both constructed *and* durable, such an argument is specious; Crenshaw calls this vulgar constructionism. i.e. you can't get rid of white supremacy by saying that race doesn't exist.
- How do we organize around identity without stabilizing identity?
- Via intersectionality theory: an issue with identity politics is not that it fails to transcend difference, but that it fails to recognize difference within identity categories.
- how is anti-racism complicit in white supremacy? how is anti-sexism complicit in patriarchy?
- there is a limit to representational politics. crenshaw talks about the policing of narratives in sexual assault re: the demonization of black men. but the protective countermeasures taken up to defend black men can also silence women of color, staging them as peripheral to the question of black male desire.
- ‘i am black vs i happen to be black’ in the event of identity constructionism. how does this language play out in intersectional politics, how do competing identities subordinate one another, and how is this solution hybridized in institutional oppression?

- putting at the center the kinds of texts reviewed this week: intellectualism and anti-intellectualism are both not enough. both the advantaged and disadvantaged need to be recognized for their thought and practice, whether or not academic language is present. strategic essentialism allows us to get outside of our own identity, once we see this and can speak past this we can do the work of strategic analysis.

~BELL HOOKS~

- popular and celebrity and white or single-issue feminism don't address comprehensive needs. they speak towards narrow values which tend to represent the oppression they speak against. privileged women for social equality.
- we should be careful to not reproduce the structures which we critique, when we are doing the work of critique.
- the notion of single-issue feminism as extreme liberal agency. however, policing this indulgence on an individual scale recenters the liberal subject, and avoids systemic critique.
- what is liberalism through the lens of enlightenment values, humanism, etc? white supremacy is an ideology that does not have any humanism about it.

~AUDRE LORDE~

- What kinds of numbness and apathy are produced under conditions of white supremacy//capitalism? What kinds of feelings are driven by witnessing the normalization of violence against black bodies? What is racial fatigue?
- Lorde expresses a dynamic of the poetics of social practice and how the experience of communities articulate new languages.
- We should be weary//wary of the separation between politics and aesthetics.

~NEXT WEEK~

- we'll review inclusivity and how it parallels / is a double for intersectionality.
- we'll read about multiculturalism and how it aligns with imperialism.
- we'll talk about the institution, how to steal from it, and how to get away.
- who has to do diversity work and who benefits from it? who is attracted to and who is exploited by *doing* diversity?

SESSION TWO, 6/28/15, MOTEN, AHMED, SPADE

When engaging inclusivity we are not critiquing the ethos of inclusivity but the usage of words such as diversity and multiculturalism as they are applied within the institution. what does the institution gain from this language, and what is lost?

to speak towards the inherent positivity of intersectional engagement is to contribute towards the erasure enacted upon black women, for whom intersectionality was developed to illuminate and intervene. Intersectional encounters are not necessarily those of conciliation, unity, diversity—but, as we recall—the metaphor of intersectionality is one of traffic collision, as in the traffic of gender and race creating compound discriminations.

If there is no foundational critique of the structures that make racism happen, diversity advocacy becomes the band-aid for liberal healing.

A “civil right” can be a participation in a system that is structurally designed to allow access for some and disallow others.

if we're trying to create an intervention within systems which are hegemonic we should critique our own discourses as well.

~AHMED. ON BEING INCLUDED~

- diversity does not address the conflict that arises when “diverse” spaces are created. Colleges, workplaces, institutions recruiting for diversity often do so without providing adequate resources for people of color to be supported in white-dominated spaces.
- diversity becomes a substitute for equality, but institutions do not take the time to develop this language or practice. diversity paints a positive sense of multicultural accord when there is often zero accountability.
- the institution offers diversity as a solution to racism, but poses racism as injuring an institution, or breaching its sense of decorum.
- ‘institutional passing’ becomes one mechanism of survival//self-defense for POC folks, but does not challenge the system itself.

~MOTEN. THE UNDERCOMMONS~

- institutions create community, but the institutional layer is negligent to its own communities, while claiming to care for them. there is pedagogy, dissent, analysis, but the institution deceives us into thinking that it is responsible or necessary for communities’ organizing.
- theft is the only possible relationship to the institution in its current frame. This is theft of knowledge, theft of material resources, and theft of a uncivil, unprofessional life disallowed by universities.
- how do we feel okay and make pockets of resistance in the institutions that we feel resentful of? *to be in, not of the institution.*

~SPADE. SEX, GENDER, AND WAR IN THE AGE OF MULTICULTURAL IMPERIALISM~

- pinkwashing: a certain kind of lgbt-aligned illusion of activism that aligns with militarism, imperialism, and state sponsored violence.
- a critique of hillary clinton’s speech, gay rights as human rights: the usa’s ostensible progressivism allows for the imperialisation and militarisation against non-western or ‘retrograde’ countries who are ‘backwards’ in their thinking or social policies.
- One new frontier of gay rights is the inclusion and visibility of trans* people in the military, and lack of consideration for queer people being murdered by said military.

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~NEXT WEEK~

we’ll be reading on borderlands theory and disidentification.

SESSION THREE, MUNOZ, ANZALDUA, SMITH 7/5/15

~DISIDENTIFICATIONS~

- how does queerness exist outside of american territories or outside of the geopolitical imaginationS? what kindS of erasure does this create for non-represented cultures?
- institutional passing ~ a mechanism of assimilation for poc and minority groups, the compromise of identity within dominant culture. for example: not wanting to be the most racialized body in a space where doing so is either not allowed or could be dangerous. finding a different language to articulate separatism.
- disidentification allows for incorporation of mainstream//antagonistic media by marginalized folks through identity formation
- when//where does queerness form? when does racialization form? along with three spheres of identification + disidentification + counteridentification we can acknowledge metronormativity; the over-valorized identity attached to queer cultures within metropolitan / urban cities.
- what is cultural property in the context of cultural appropriation? who owns and informs language in the process of identification.

~BORDERLANDS~

- *terms* ::
chicano ~ a kind of self-determination of mexican-american identity.
mestizo ~ a person of combined cultures
mestizaje, the process of of mixing ancestries
double-consciousness ~ existing within different social identities whether it be race, language, culture, orientation, making it unconventional to develop a modern *sense of self*.
- there are sovereign nations within the united states which are not represented as part of our collective territory. how do these sites play into notions of outsourcing and insourcing?
- the discomfort within the text is intentional, to create mental, emotional, geographic space between the 'we' and the 'you'. language, theory, text does not need to be written for the white male.
- a borderland becomes a third space, straddling the intersections of multiple geographies.
- "decolonize yourself" ~ the attempt to experience something that is not inherently a part of our modern culture, city, mind. the desire to find a pre-western society that does not reify patriarchal and exploitative culture.

~QUEER THEORY AND NATIVE STUDIES~

- what is colonialism vs settler colonialism? colonialism often refers to (predominantly) western countries establishing or extending political power into further territories. however, colonialism can "end" through uprisings, revolt, decolonization. settler colonialism refers to the movement of settlers who bring their own sovereignty with them as in the way that u.s. settlers were encouraged to occupy indigenous land. gentrification has been described as settler colonialism on a micro scale as those coming in with their own expanded sovereignty, through access to police intervention, legal recourse, resources.
- how do we talk about the u.s. as a force settler colonialism? the unevenness of power structures, the movement of sovereignty, and cultural domination.

- native culture has been systematically erased. there is an impossibility of representation for native people.
- How do queer and critical race sensibilities for mixed cultures paint indigeneity as culturally stuck, retrograde, or in need of ‘transcending’?

SESSION FOUR, FANON, SPIVAK, DUBOIS 7/19/15

PHILOSOPHERS AND THINKER

- Spivak’s “Can There Be A Feminist World?” (2015)
- The humanities ‘wringing their hands’ over their continued relevance,
- Argues that humanitarian work cannot replace the humanities and its commitments to imagining radical change.
- Fanon’s “Concerning Violence” – what are the limits we put on revolt in liberal discourse? At what point does it become unpalatable/unmanageable?
- Fanon’s critics say he advocates violence, suggesting that violence has no place in ethics, is the end point of ethics.
- (**note: documentary on Wretched of the Earth now available from the people who made Black Power Mixtape, narrated by Ms. Lauren Hill**)

BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTS

- 1950s-60’s is one moment of anticolonial thinking – figures like Frantz Fanon, Aime Cesaire initiate discourses on colonialism. Later on Edward Said will develop his account of orientalism (1978).
- Differences between –Anticolonialism –Decolonisation –Post-Colonialism—settler colonialism
- DuBois in the early 1900s writes of the double consciousness – a split identity enacted through seeing oneself through the eyes of the **dominator**
- *Subaltern* – a subject position without representational capacity or representational consciousness
- within the context of ‘cultural hegemony’-how imperialism works → erasure

MAJORITY → representation
 minority → representation
 s u b a l t e r n → no representation

- intersectional example of subalternity. In *degraaffenreid v GM*, no black women were hired yet couldn’t claim sexism or racism because there were black male and white female employees. in legal avenues black women could not even represent themselves for the fact of not hewing to narratives of minoritization. They are marginal but somehow not minor *enough*.

- Subaltern ≠ oppressed. A position once claimed, once it is representable, cannot be subaltern.
- Also see Spivak's negotiation of *sati*, the *differend* presents as the woman caught between affirmative-ritualistic and cautionary-colonial accounts of the grieving widow.
- The subaltern suggests a total inaccessibility to representational power – not “I want my place at the table/slice of the pie” – you're not even aware the pie exists or there is a table to occupy.
- The “ideal oppressed”? White woman in single-issue feminism, Black man in single-issue anti-racism
- indigenous women, unorganized peasant labor → no access to representation.

GENTRIFICATION AS NEOCOLONIALISM

- How to invoke Fanon re: gentrification? What is there left to do when evictions start happening?
- ‘The Colony’ – new housing in Bushwick, catch line is “The New Frontier of Brooklyn” – ew
- How to respond to this? With political strategizing? But is this a matter of simply calling on the state? Writing letters to senators? Or does it demand radical reorganizing of what interventions look like?
- Violence? (Fanon) – what does it look like in today's/this context? Slippery – how can you respond with violence in the framework of the state?
- With white supremacy and neoliberalism built into the state, just existing as anything outside of this can be read as violence; anti-violence fails us when the destruction of property or the disruption of capital is given attention over black lives & bodies.
- If a violent response means arming against gentrification, how do we read Fanon's critiques in our contemporary moment? What about self-negation or political self-harm? When you have no voice other than violence, and at its most extreme form, maybe the only violence you can commit is to your own body.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

- DuBois – we need to talk about how living under white supremacy *feels*. When do we realize we are gendered/racialized/classed/queer etc?
- Gentrification asks us to navigate the idea of ‘localness’ at smaller scales than the historical moments of colonialism might indicate. Who is a native Detroiter? How do economically dominant gentrifiers bring their own sovereignty with them, through recourse to police intervention or resource hoarding?
- Thoughts on Fanon:

- Fanon characterizes violence as masculine. There is a need to de-gender that space... or to question his imaging of violence as muscular and vital over softer forms of violence.
- Spivak – gossip as a strategy of the subaltern
- Should we even try to access/give voice to the subaltern? Because would that be re-inscribe the system of re-presentation she seeks to condemn (ie should not attempt to translate into the dominant system. vs ‘strategic essentialism’ – political organizing demands that we use simplified terms & give concrete examples to theory that doesn’t *really* encapsulate the whole picture.

SESSION FIVE: HARAWAY, NAKAMURA, NGUYEN (7/26/15)

~CYBORG MANIFESTO~

- to situate haraway’s context, this was written in 1985 just after blade runner and just before terminator. in the timeline for this class haraway’s writing is also contemporaneous to the development of intersectionality within women of color’s writings as well as the formation of the ‘silicon valley.’
- how do we think about the cyborg as another intersectional theory; one that is heavily raced, or heavily invested in the critical study of race? the cyborg is imaged in the woman of color laborer, something lost in the aesthetic accounts of cyborg theory.
- an honest way of looking at our technology is to look inside of it, not to see circuits but to see the labor of women of color and consider the erasure of their bodies in the marketing of tech products.
- haraway speaks of responsibility in addition to pleasure-- how is the pleasure of the cyborg manifesto extracted without responsibility?

~RACE IN CYBERSPACE~

- nakamura writes about identity tourism on the internet
- the only acceptable representations of race in her account of multi-user fantasies are orientalist, fetishistic, or ahistorical. attempting to roleplay as an incidentally raced character ‘disrupts’ the fantasy of gaming. i.e. in order to be asian online, one must carry a sword or wear a kimono.
- critical race analysis can constitute its own kind of technological expertise: how am i coding vs can i code.
- when addressing the intersections of technology and the body, our discourses must engage with the whiteness of technology’s developments. how do we formulate a narrative or counter-narrative over technology that does not reify whiteness or maleness? we speak to labor. before software components, before usability, we have the hands and labor of women of color; they can be seen, in another story of technological development, as ‘other’ originators of tech culture.
- to practice cyborg critique is to look for erasures in the narratives of how our technologies are developed.

~QUEER CYBORGS & NEW MUTANTS~

- mimi nguyen's critique of the cyborg (and how it has been interpreted) is that it allows us to transcend identity and become effortlessly flexible//fluid. to whom is this fantasy viable? how does this engage with or disengage from race and gender analysis?
- 'the recombinant liberal subject of cyberspatial fantasy': the vulgar constructionist dismisses identity as something that entraps subjects, and interprets the cyborg as a figure through which to 'transcend' identity, rather than engaging it responsibly.
- identity tourism extends beyond the injustices and oppressive behavior exhibited through the web, but is portrayed through the digital imaging of drones and the user interfacing and accessibility of our technology. the digital divide does not advocate for the emotional labor of people of color.
- mutancy is always reliant on an acceptance of identity formation, and not its assimilation or transcendence.
- how can we reconfigure the cyborg as looped into identity rather than antagonistic to cultural formation? by understanding what it feels like to be racialized and othered, elements of cyborg theory might address the reasons why one would *not* want to reject one's origins, as in examples of indigeneity, or in resistance to cultural erasures.