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Discourse Theory and Political Analysis

David Howarth

in Research Strategies in the Social Sciences: A Guide to New Approaches

An overview of contributions to the development of discourse theoretical approaches in social science from the work of Althusser, Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Laclau, and Mouffe. Particular attention is given to the concepts of signification, antagonisms, political subjectivity, agency, hegemony, the hermeneutical tradition in social science, and how to apply deconstruction methods.

Rethinking Difference

Shannon Winnubst

in Way Too Cool: Selling Out Race and Ethics

By following out the argument that the classic social authority of the Symbolic function is waning in the neoliberal episteme, I argue that Althusserian interpellation fails to capture the kinds of subject formation underway in it. I then draw the connection directly to the Althusserian conceptualizations of social difference we inherit from early theorists of queer theory, specifically Judith Butler and Jose Esteban Muñoz. By tracing the Althusserian roots of these two theorists, I demonstrate how the dominant understandings of gender and race spawned by queer theory may be insufficient for thinking resistance in the neoliberal episteme.

The Crisis of Theory

Scott Hamilton

This book tells the story of the political and intellectual adventures of Edward Palmer Thompson, one of Britain's foremost twentieth-century thinkers. It shows that all of Thompson's work, from his acclaimed histories to his voluminous political writings to his little-noticed poetry, was inspired by the same passionate and idiosyncratic vision of the world. The book demonstrates the connection between Thompson's famously ferocious attack on the 'Stalinism in theory' of Louis Althusser and his assaults on positivist social science in such books as The making of the English working class, and produces evidence to show that Thompson's hostility to both left- and right-wing forms of authoritarianism was rooted in first-hand experience of violent political repression.

The Turn of the Voice

Judith A. Peraino

in Giving Voice to Love: Song and Self-Expression from the Troubadours to Guillaume de Machaut

This chapter applies the concept of "the turn" in Louis Althusser's theory of subject formation through interpellation by language to the musical turning points in medieval love lyrics that are tornadas, envois, and refrains. In most cases tornadas and envois are fragmentary half-stanzas that break the formal and thematic structure of the strophic canso and chanson with an abrupt change of voice and address, from the "timeless" idiomatic language of courtly love to a sudden rooting in the author's present. Yet this moment of transparent subjectivity recycles rhymes, notes, and sometimes words in a way that resembles refrain procedures. Refrains in the context of dance songs are allegedly group responses, while in the context of chansons, motets, and narratives they often represent a quotation or reported song—a repetition of a different order. The familiar yet fresh musico-poetic turns of tornadas, envois, and refrains bring to the fore the paradox of agency and submission as well as ambiguities of subjectivity and expression inherent in medieval

love songs; they formalize and thus authorize the disruption of the conventional voice, signaling the fissures between the self and the subject, as well as subjective and collective voices.

Celebricities

Anthony Curtis Adler

Taking its departure from a phenomenological encounter with television—indeed a rethinking of the phenomenological method in terms of the way in which the experience of television disarticulates life, opposing my life to the life that is not mine to live and yet mine not to live—this book attempts to illuminate the ontology of late capitalism, focusing on celebrity culture and the rise of the pluripotent gadget. While Heidegger's analysis of Dasein in Being and Time will serve as the starting point, the theorization of the gadget in particular proceeds by means of bringing Heidegger's ontology into dialogue with the Marxist theory of the commodity and Althusser's treatment of ideology. Gadget-commodity-life will come to be understood in terms of a reproduction of the "alethic," rather than merely ideological, conditions of production. For production to remain possible it will become increasingly necessary to have the commodity itself "stage" the play of concealment-unconcealment as the ontological basis of production. Whereas the first part of this book develops a theoretical frame work through a sustained argument, the second part will attempt to "screen" television, celebrity, and gadget-commodity-life itself through a series of fragmentary theoretical encounters. These will attempt, moreover, to show how the pop-culture objects of late capitalism exist only through the possibility of a theoretical encounter with them—or, in other words, exist as phenomenological.

Interlude: Rival Humanisms

David E. Cooper

in The Measure of Things: Humanism, Humility, and Mystery

This chapter defends the author's way of understanding humanism in terms of the 'human world' thesis against rival ways, most especially

that of Foucault's. Firstly, it tries to disprove the view of Loius Althusser on essentialism due to the lack of historical warrant for providing a characterization of humanism. Secondly, it rejects humanism as naturalism also on the basis of historical warrant. Thirdly, it tries to disprove humanism as a doctrine of rational subjectivity by attacking the points of Foucault on the 'theory of the knowing subject'. It concludes that the main reason that the rival ways are rejected is their failure to capture the notion it set out to explain.

History and Event

Nathan Coombs

This book challenges the use of the terms 'history' and 'event' to register the shift from historical necessity in Marxism to contingent events in contemporary philosophy. It argues both classical Marxism and a strand of French theory after Louis Althusser understand history and event not as binary opposites but as a complementary pair. For Marxism, the fusion is accomplished by Hegelian dialectics and the idea of quantity to quality leaps. After Althusser, epistemological breaks in science provide the model for thinking revolutions as discontinuous with the status quo. Through critical readings of Hegel, Marx and Lenin, the first part of the book interrogates the politics of Marxist philosophy. While defending Marx from charges of 'historicism', the inability of Hegel's 'leaps' to think epistemological breaks is shown to support political gradualism and technological determinism. The book's second part, on Althusser, Badiou and Meillassoux, argues that although their philosophies think discontinuity more successfully, they tend towards a self-referential rationalism that shores up the authority of theorists. The final part of the book suggests that a way forward can be found in complexity theory and 'weak' notions of emergence.

Introduction

Philip J. Kain

in Marx and Ethics

This book discusses the views of Karl Marx regarding ethics and the shifts and development in those views, with the goal of resolving one of the major recent debates over the nature of the ethical views of the later Marx. It argues that Marx's later writings are the culmination of a development, and that the later Marx is the more interesting and valuable. The shifts in Marx's thought are evident in his concept of ethics and morality as well as his theory of revolution. These shifts and developments are presented in a very different way from Louis Pierre Althusser. The book also refutes the notion that the later Marx is an anti-humanist. In fact, later Marx is a humanist and his humanism is an outgrowth of, but different from, the humanism of his early writings.

Introduction: Historicism and the Cultural Present in Shakespeare Studies: Subjectivity in Early and Late Modernity

Hugh Grady

in Shakespeare, Machiavelli, and Montaigne: Power and Subjectivity from Richard II to Hamlet

This introductory chapter begins with an analysis of how historicist approaches to Shakespeare have come to dominate the field, obscuring the 'presentist' qualities of contemporary historicism. But a confrontation with the thinking and feeling of the 'now' is inevitable and desirable in our approaches to the cultural past, with the works of Shakespeare a crucial case in point. The following analysis of Machiavellian and Montaignean influences on the Henriad and Hamlet is itself informed by the rise in the 90s of a number of modifications to the theories of the subject of the 80s. These theories arose from texts of Foucault and Althusser, and, in addition to their insights, they led at times to reductive readings, blind to the actions of agency. A corrective is provided by the Frankfurt School approach to power and subjectivity. Both the past and the cultural present are relevant to this study, which uses Machiavelli and Montaigne as historical sources with relevance to our own day and its cultural theory.

Conclusion

Benjamin Noys

in The Persistence of the Negative: A Critique of Contemporary Continental Theory

The conclusion tries to sketch in more detail what a politics and theory of relational negativity might consist of. It does so by turning to a politics of abstraction, which accepts the necessity of abstraction and that tries to traverse abstraction. First, the conclusion argues that we must resist the usual reified forms of negativity: human suffering and violent destruction. Rather than a discourse of perpetual destruction and permanent revolution, negativity can be thought as moments of attack and preservation of non-commodified areas of life. Use is then made of Althusser's work on art to develop a relational negativity that engages with and traverses the effects of abstraction. Rather than the search for a concrete point of resistance the conclusion suggests the need to map and analyse relational forms of negation. Also, the problem of agency is posed to argue that contemporary theory all too often leaves agency in an alternation between the passive and the active that fails to attend to a proper mediation.