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1 week 7, archives

Goals:

- adjusting some aspects of our class discussion, to bring in discussion posts, sharing with class
- second half of class, will start with brainstorming topics for the final paper project. Start with freewriting on our favorite readings, and why.

Introductions (10m)

Discussion post Pair & Share (20-25)

- groups of 3-4: what did you write about? (10)
- choose one, turn into discussion question (5)
- share with class (5-10)
- write on the board

Discuss (30)

BREAK

- introduce critical analysis assignment (10 m)

- brainstorming final projects 50 m - 1 hr:
 - freewrite: 5 minutes
 - * What was the most interesting reading of the course so far?
 - what about these did you find interesting?
 - share with the class, keywords (45 m)
 - * going around the room and sharing what you liked and why
 - 2 min maximum
 - * the class helps to come up with 2 keywords for that reading

(THERE WAS NO TIME) Digital Collections Interface individual activity (10m):

- choose an interface: LHA, NYPL, NYC Municipal Archives
- try to find the digital archive section, and browse through the items.
 - what can you guess about the way that documents are organized?
 - what does the archive prioritize?
- Share (5-10m)

(THERE WAS NO TIME) In groups, organized by archive (10m):

- what ways can the online interface be designed that speaks to some of the aspects from our discussion?
 - community-driven or oriented collections
 - * folksonomies
 - serendipitous discoveries (elevating more marginalized objects)
- Discuss (15m)

1.1 readings

1.1.1 McKinney, Cait. 2015. Body, Sex, Interface: Reckoning with Images at the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Radical History Review 122: 115–28.

About the work being done at a community, volunteer run archives.

Asks a central question, very related to Hartman, which is: **how do we catalog things, make them visible and accessible, without also**

incorporating/subscribing them into a normalizing scheme? How do we label things and allow them to maintain a certain kind of dynamicity?

Much of the data in the archives cannot be fully categorized/cataloged and digitized, because (1) we never got that information from the donor, we take everything and anything, "undescribability" and lack of donor agreements, and (2) we don't have the resources to do all of that work.

- folksonomies
- "the ways that all kinds of sex practices and gendered ways of being scramble the categorical logics of structured databases" (3).

Designing for serendipitous experiences (the interface):

- What kind of interface would replicate some of the "uncategorizable" aspects of the materials?
- "Pulling a "what do you say about this?" image out of the photo drawer evokes wonder, because the ways these photos do not make sense are difficult to catalog and capture through mechanisms such as the searchable database form" (10).

Being visible vs being integrated/maintreamed:

- There is a desire for access, which is good. But being seen also suggests being included, and being included into what kind of citizen:
- "LGBT archives are worlding technologies that can be called on to support homonational trends, in which the recognition of gay and lesbian citizen-subjects as rightly historical is tied to broader political agendas of gendered and racialized violence, exclusion, and empire in the present. Photographic archives, in particular, shift this politics into a regime of visibility that associates being seen with being welcomed into the fold of liberalism" (8).

1.1.2 Hartman, Saidiya. "Venus in Two Acts." *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008, p. 1-14. Project MUSE muse.jhu.edu/article/241115.

Her main question is how can we write history under these conditions of scarcity/absence and of language:

- "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (4).

"The violence of the archive" - we only receive things in the violent terms of their subjection.

- "The archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence. This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power" (10).
 - A condition also known as the "violence of the archive," she describes the archive as a "death sentence," because it only records the subject in the terms of their objectification, in "a display of the violated body, an inventory of property" (2).
- Hartman here looks at the problem of what to do with an absent archive. Not only absence in the form of evidence, that the literal records are missing, but also in the tools of expression, in language that cannot approximate the reality of experience, and in the discourse that dictates silence.

She seeks to recuperate (without recovering) the lives of these subjects. To write about them in a way that does not do more damage, but draws attention to the ways that their lives have been delineated while inviting possibility for living. To create in the mode of "critical fabulation" (11).

She examines the history of Venus, the unnamed slave woman who appears variously throughout the "official" record. From this history, Hartman concludes that there is no way forward with recovery. She turns to consider a series of paradoxical questions:

- "how does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?" (3).
- "how does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death, the account books that identified them as units of value, the invoices that claimed them as property, and the banal chronicles that stripped them of human features?" (3)
- "How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know?" (3).
- "If it is no longer sufficient to expose the scandal, then how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive?" (7).

The archivist of slavery comes up against the incommensurability between reality and the historical record, the archivist must endeavor to engage this incommensurability: "to expose and exploit the incommensurability between the experience of the enslaved and the fictions of history, by which I mean the requirements of narrative, the stuff of subjects and plots and ends" (10).

- "This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration" (11).

In the scarcity of material (not one autobiographical account of a female survives), most of what we have left are numbers. Can we then fill the void with stories?

- "Loss gives rise to longing, and in these circumstances, it would not be far-fetched to consider stories as a form of compensation or even as reparations, perhaps the only kind we will ever receive" (4).

1.1.3 Drabinski, Emily. "Queering the Catalog: Queer Theory and the Politics of Correction." *The Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2013, pp. 94–111

What does queer theory give to cataloguing? It gives a perspective that nothing will ever be perfectly described. That engaging with materials is a dialogical process, that markup will always be complex and biased.

"dialogic engagement" - a back and forth engagement with sources, rather than a one-way engagement.

Narrative around Gay and Lesbian Studies vs Queer Theory.

- G&L was about filling a gap, giving voice to an absence, and QT was about outlining the queer subject.

The location of where queer and trans books have been cataloged, as sexual deviance, trans next to homosexuality, suggesting certain kinds of relationships between them.

The subject headings themselves containing bias.

Queer theory assumes that all categorizing schemas are contingent to history and context. Nothing is universal.

Queer is always in resistance. It needs a norm in order to define itself against. "Lesbian should be replaced by Dyke" (103).

Solutions:

- "Turning library access structures into pedagogical tools"
- making tagging system / links visible
- user tagging

1.1.4 “How to become a pirate archivist,” by Anna’s Archive.

10/22/2017. <https://annas-archive.org/blog/blog-how-to-become-a-pirate-archivist.html>

- they are pirates, not bound by law, but only by an imperative to make all information accessible by scraping collections on the internet and sharing them.
- they are lonely.
- what are their strategies for the archival work?
 - data scraping
 - metadata gathering
 - mirroring collections
 - hosting the content
 - seeding the content