Curiosity is Political

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Why Political?

Defining Curiosity:
—Curiosity is an ensemble of investigative practices.
  • It is propelled by socially configured knowledge-desires.

—Curiosity is political.
  • Who is curious, when, and how reflects the differential allocation of power in a society.

—Curiosity affects the *polis*.
  • Whether it maintains or transforms it.

(Zurn, forthcoming; Zurn and Shankar, forthcoming)
Political Curiosity Across History

Ancient
• Politicians and empires
• Anthropologists and geographers

Medieval
• Religious vice
• Secular inquiry, secular travel (*curiosi*)

Modern
• Modern science
• Spectacles; exoticized objects

(Zacher 1974; Leigh 2013; Zurn forthcoming)
Models of Curiosity

Why Models?

“Curiosity” in Western philosophy

- Greek: polypragmosune, periergia
- Latin: curiositas
- French: curiosité
- German: Neugier, Wissbegier, Kuriosität
- English: curiosity

Busybody, Hunter, Dancer
collecting, tracking, imagining

(Zurn, forthcoming)
Busybody, Hunter, Dancer

Busybody: discrete bits of information
loose knowledge networks
—Social Collection

Hunter: targeted connections
tight knowledge networks
—Social Investigation

Dancer: discontinuous concepts
remodeled knowledge networks
—Social Imagination
(Zurn and Bassett, forthcoming; Zurn, forthcoming)

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Curiosity and Political Resistance

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
Michel Foucault (1926-1984)
Jacques Derrida (1930-2004)

—Institutionalized curiosity entrenches social structures.
—Resistant curiosity transforms social structures.

(Zurn, 2018a; Zurn, 2018b; Zurn, forthcoming)
Civil Rights Movement

Institutional Curiosity
— Media covers many things, but not segregation
— National policy addresses many problems, but not race
— US future is imagined, but by white elites

Resistant Curiosity
— Fact Gathering: *We Charge Genocide* (1951)
— Problematizing Race through Nonviolent Protest
— Political Imagination: MLK, “I have a dream” (1963)

(Pelton, 1974; Zurn, forthcoming)
Curiosity, Diversity, Higher Ed

Why Curiosity?

Diversity work = adding different bodies
  • Different people will ask different questions.
  • A diverse body of people is more likely to ask new questions.

How did we get here?

What is it like to be a “diverse” person in academia?

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Curiosity, Diversity, Higher Ed

Diversity work =

—“attending to what gets passed over”
  (Ahmed, 2012)

—takes “curiosity”
  (Prescod-Weinstein, 2017)

Marginalized Faculty Testimonials:

—Our curiosity often goes unrecognized or dismissed.
  (Kafer, 2013; Kimmerer, 2013; Muhs et al., 2012; Pitcher, 2018)
Conclusion

Curiosity is always embedded in—and capable of disrupting—social practices and political structures.

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References


References


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