Twitter Thread by Wokal Distance

Wokal Distance
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A huge mistake people make is to think of postmodernism, post-structuralism, intersectionality, Critical Legal Studies, Critical Race Theory, 4th wave feminism, and Critical Theory as being separate and distinct, having nothing to do with each other

This is a massive mistake.

2/
These disciplines are connected. They are not like individual academic factories producing different theories. The fact is that the ideas that are produced in various disciplines cross-pollinate and influence each other. The theorists make use of and share each others ideas.

3/
These fields are akin to ingredients used by activists to make the stew of Critical Social Justice.

Mix some postmodernism here with some intersectionality there, add Critical Race Theory and 4th wave feminist post-structuralism and *taste test* YUMMY...Social Justice!■■■

4/
Take a look through the activist literature and you'll see that they pull from all these theorists as they see fit and as they find it useful.

An excellent example of this is the book/website: "Beautiful Trouble." You can see how this dynamic works in that book.

5/
You all know the old trick about how "postmoderns" and Marxists are totally different? Well that was true at one time, but woke activists will gladly take ideas from both the Postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault (1st pic) and the Marxist Antonio Gramsci (2nd pic)

New website coming soon! In the meantime, check out the latest version of our too

THEORY: Intellectuals and power



Foucalt's basic premise (apparently quite disconcerting to the audience pictured here) is that power is a force that acts through every institution and relationship in society, so that our very sense of self is a product of its shaping force.

Contributed by Zack Malitz

6/
We also have:
-feminists challenging patriarchy
-decolonizing performance art and,
-Anti-oppression (with information from Feminist English prof Peggy Macintosh, and bell hooks, author of "Postmodern Blackness")

That's feminism, Post-colonial Theory, English and postmodernism

PRINCIPLE:

Challenge patriarchy as you organize



(Left to right) 'I think she made the whole thing up.' 'She's just a crazy bitch.' 'Look, SWEETIE: class should come first. The rest is just divisive.' 'It's not really as bad as you say it is.' In order to be an effective comrade/ally you have to challenge patriarchy within yourself, and within the group. Art by Suzy Exposito.

Contributed by Harsha Walia

7/

Do you see how this works? The Critical Social Justice practitioners take the *theories* created in the academy and they begin applying them in real life. The theories that work get kept, the ones that do not work get tossed aside.

And so it goes.

8/

Part of the game that gets played by the "CRITICAL RACE THEORY ISN'T POSTMODERNISM YOU GUYS DON'T DO THE READING" is to act as though each of the disciplines that feeds into Critical Social Justice is separate and discreet, unrelated to the others.

This is not the case.

9/
That doesn't mean there's no fights over territory and no boundary lines, It means the theories are ALWAYS being shared and repurposed across disciplinary lines. So, insisting on and appealing to ultra strict readings will render one unable to see how these theories evolve.

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Here's an example. Follow along and the payoff is worth it.

This is a review of Gayatyari Spivaks' new translation of Jacques Derrida's "Of Grammatology" with a forward by the famed theorist Judith Butler.

The review Is done by Geoffrey Bennington.
https://t.co/A7DPoOEVeV

11/
To set this up, Gayatyari Spivak is one of the most well known and well published Post-Colonial theorists and is considered a foundational theorist in postcolonial theory., Judith Butler is just as famous and just as foundational in what is now called Queer theory....

12/
The book being reviewed is Spivaks updated version of her translation of Derrida's "Of Grammatology" which she first translated in 1976.

Spivak and Judith Butler both used Derrida's theories a LOT. They talk about Derrida *constantly* in their work.

13/
The reviewer is Geoffrey Bennington, Derrida's greatest American protege. Derrida and Bennington worked so closely that they wrote a book together. Bennington is considered to be the worlds foremost expert on Derrida. He is also fluent in french, the language Derrida wrote in

14/
Bennington proceeds to point out that Judith Butler doesn't seem to know what Derrida was actually saying, and that Spivak seems to be mistranslating Derrida on nearly every page.

Remember, Bennington is fluent in French and wrote a book with Derrida, he knows the work...

15/
Bennington points out Butlers many errors in her forward to the book and then says the Translation itself is deeply flawed. If you want to know how terrible the translation is, the name of his review is "Embarrassing ourselves." It's that bad.

So why does this matter?

16/
Because the Butler (who apparently doesn't actually understand Derrida) and Spivak (who spoke neither french nor english perfectly) used their incomplete and flawed understanding of Derrida's work to become foundational Scholars in Queer Theory and Postcolonial Theory...

17/
I'm sure Spivak and Butler understand some of Derrida, or even most of Derrida. The problem is they became foundational Scholars in their field's using an incomplete understanding of his work and Spivak's flawed translation will be used by many people studying Derrida....

18/
But, if you want to look at what influenced Queer theory and you look at a proper and full account of exactly what Derrida was really arguing and then compare that to modern Queer theory your going to miss the way that his work was appropriated and used by Butler...

19/
And in the "Critical Race Theory, Postmodern, Queer Theory, Gender Studies" cluster of disciplines this is common. Imperfect translations, misinterpretations, misapplications, are all over the place. Those disciplines take whatever they want and use it however they want...

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Students were taught deconstruction, and they worked in television, and began to apply deconstruction in their own way to things like sitcoms.

When Derrida was asked about this he said "deconstruction as I understand it does not produce any sitcom."



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See the problem? This happens all the time in the academic fields that feed Critical Social Justice. Ideas get misused, pulled out of context, and contorted in ways that were never intended because in many cases the scholars doing the work are not held to rigorous standards.

22/
So the next time someone says that Critical Social justice isn't really using postmodernism, you can be charitable and say yeah, they likely are mixing in several ideas from a wide variety of sources. (This is how we get "deconstructive" T.V.)

23/
But the mix and match is no excuse to avoid the inevitable: that they really are using postmodern ideas fashioned into social weapons that they wish to use in the name of their vision of social justice.

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PS/
Finally, A word about Derrida and Foucault:
The nature of their ideas is such that even if you do get them exactly right, it is very hard to see how you follow their ideas the whole way without ending up with an anti-realist epistemology.

PPS/
When I said Bennington is Derrida's greatest American protege I meant most active protege currently in America (he teaches at Emory University) but I made it sound like he an American citizen when Bennington is actually British. I should have been more clear.