

Emergence of critical and cultural theories



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Culture : the learned behavior of members of a given social group. Cultural studies: Focus use of media to create forms of culture that structure everyday life. Political economy theories: Focus on social elites' use of economic power to exploit media institutions. 2 There are microscopic interpretive theories that focus on how individuals and social groups use media to create and foster forms of culture that structure everyday life. These theories are referred to as cultural studies theories.

There are macroscopic structural theories that focus on how social elites use their economic power to gain control over and 3 Cultural Theory: Theories openly espousing certain values and using these values to evaluate and criticize the status quo providing alternate ways of interpreting the social role of mass media. Those who develop critical theories seek to initiate social change that will implement their values. Political economy theories are inherently critical but some cultural studies 4 Critical theories often provides complex explanations for this tendency of media to consistently do so.

E. g: some critical theorists identify constraints on media practitioners that limit their ability to challenge established authority. They charge that few incentives exist to encourage media professionals to overcome these constraints and that media 5 Critical theory often analyzes specific social institutions, probing the extent to which valued objects are sought and achieved. Mass Media and the mass culture have been linked to a variety of social problems, they are criticized for aggravating or preventing problems from being identified or addressed.

A common theme in critical theories of media is that content production is so constrained. Consider for example, the last time you read news about members of a social movement that strongly challenged the status quo? Why were the college students who protested against the Communist Chinese government in Tiananmen Square “ heroes of democracy” and those in American anti-war “ hippies” and “ radicals? ” Stories about movements imply problems with confrontation. Movement leaders demand coverage of their complaints and they stage demonstrations designed to draw public attention to their concerns.

Elites seek to minimize coverage or to exercise “ spin control” so that the coverage favors their position. How do journalists handle this? How should they handle it? Existing research indicates that this coverage almost always degenerates movements and supports elites. Critical theory: Strengths: 1. Is politically based, action-oriented. 2. Uses theory and research to plan change in the real world. 3. Asks big, important questions about media control and ownership. Weaknesses: 3. When subjected to scientific verification, often employs innovative but controversial research methods. Rise of Cultural Theories in Europe: Despite its long life in American Social Science, the Limited Effects Paradigm never enjoyed great popularity in Europe. European social research has instead been characterized by what U.S. observers regard as grand social theories. Grand Social Theory: Highly ambitious, In Europe, the development of grand social theory remained a central concern in the social sciences and humanities. Mass society theory gave way to a succession of alternate ideas. Some were limited to specific nations and others spread across many countries.

Some of the most widely accepted have been based on the writings of Karl Marx. Marxist theory influenced even the theories that were created in reaction against it. Marxist ideas formed a foundation or touch stone for most postWorld War II european social theory and research. 12 Cold War politics colored much of the U. S. Response to it. Ironically, in the 1970s and 1980s, at the very time that Marxist failed as a practical guide for politics and economics in Eastern Europe, grand social theories based on Marxist thought were gaining increasing acceptance in Western Europe. 3 MARXIST THEORY: Marxist Theory: Theory arguing that the hierarchical class system is at the root of all social problems and must be ended by a revolution of the proletariat. Karl Marx developed this theory in the latter part of the nineteenth century during one of the most volatile periods of social change in Europe. In some respects, his theory is yet another version of mass society theory-- but with several very important alterations and additions. 14 He identified industrialization and urbanization as problems but argued that these changes were not inherently bad.

Instead, he blamed ruthless robber baron capitalists for exacerbating social problems because they maximized personal profits by exploiting workers. Marx argued that the hierarchical class system was the root of all social problems and must be ended by a revolution of the workers or proletariat. He believed that elites dominated society primarily through their direct control over the means of production (i. e. , labor, factories, land) which he referred to as the base of society. 15 But elites also maintained themselves in power through their control over culture, or the superstructure of society.

He saw culture as something that elites freely manipulated to mislead average people and encourage them to act against their own interest. He used the term ideology to refer to these forms of culture. To him, ideology operated much like a drug. Those who were under its influence fail to see how they are being exploited. In worst cases, they are so deceived, that they actually 16 - undermine their own interests and do things that increase the power of elites while making their own lives even worse. Marx concluded that the only hope for social change was a revolution in which the masses seized control of the base -- the means of production.

Control over the superstructure -over ideology -- would naturally follow. He saw little possibility that reforms in the super structure could lead to social evolution, or if it could, that -that transformation would be very slow in coming. Elites would never willingly surrender POWER. Power must be taken from them. Little purpose would be served by making minor changes in ideology 17 - without first dominating the means of production. Neomarxist Theory: Contemporary incarnation of Marxist theory focusing attention on the super structure.

The importance that Neomarxists attach to the super structure has created a fundamental division within Marxism. Many neomaxists assume that useful change can begin with peaceful, ideological reform rather than violent revolution in which the working class seizes control of the means of production. 18 Some neomarxists have developed critiques that call for radically transforming the superstructure while others call for modest reforms. Tensions have arisen among scholars who base their work on

Marx's ideas over the value of the work being done by the various neomarxist schools.