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GCST1601

Introduction to Cultural Studies

7/3/2018 Dr Guy Redden

Lecture Notes: Introduction: Exploring Culture

Contention Points:
- Culture cannot be categorised, but is fluid and changeable based on our own perspectives, interpretations and value sets
- Culture is not a linear exchange of patterns of behaviour, but is an interlocking spectrum
- The value of culture and even the recognition of culture is a product of power and privilege
- Whilst some academics believe in the categories of cultural practise, it is more likely that our society exists as an interlocking web of cultures
- Whilst we may view forms of culture that we do not associate with as romanticised, it is just as likely that as individuals and members of cultural groups, we too romanticise the practises we associate with ourselves

What is culture?
- Separated based on different characteristics; aesthetic (media, folk, mass), place, social
- Our own definitions of culture are reflective of our own contexts and patterns of thinking
- Culture itself arose with the emergence of popular culture in the 19th C resulting from:
    1. Technological development
    2. Urbanisation
    3. Working class demand
    4. Commercialisation
- Thus, the emergence of cinema

Classic concepts of culture
- <u>Humanist:</u> the development and bettering of Western based society
"know the best that has been said and thought in the world" (M. Arnold, Literature and Dogma, 1873)
- Previously no justification of why something is the best; product of power and privilege
- <u>Social Science:</u> recognising society as made of a complex web of pieces "complete whole" (E.Burnett Tylor) Tylor's 'Primitive Culture' (1871) recognised the alternative cultures beyond traditional Western
- Belief that people belong to categorical social groups
- <u>Functionalist:</u> The importance of culture in maintaining social order (Emile Durkheim)
- Question of the relationship between instinct and normality- we act in a certain way to fit in, as a result of cultural norms- not because of instinct
- Historically, religion has been a prime centre dictating and controlling action
- Work and reward system- stability and normality
- REALISTICALLY diversity and disagreement mean functionalism to be a flawed concept
- Culture CAN mean the submission of its followers (power) e.g patriarchy

Cultural Studies
- As an educational form emerging mid 20th century with writers such as R.Hoggart, S.Hall
- Raising belief in the importance of popular culture and the study of our own culture
- Alternative focus from common narrative of white, rich, straight men -> working class, women, different races and contexts = different engagements with culture
- Emergence of feminism, civil rights etc ask to examine toxicity of culture – society is made of human action therefore can be altered
- <u>Raymond Williams-</u> Rejection of the romanticised culture with a sense of <u>felt</u> culture in place- how it can influence identity and social power

- Believed in the 'ordinary' of culture "the making of a society is the finding of common meanings and directions…the growing society is there, yet it is also made and remade in every individual mind." - Culture is not just a reflection of life e.g art galleries but also life itself
Debates about cultural value - If culture comes in different forms can it be viewed differently and maintain a different level of 'worth and how can we justify this? e.g porn, graffiti, reality TV - 'High' and 'low' culture is dependent on idealisation and social perspectives - Kenneth Clark's (1969) 'Civilisation' projects a celebrated culture of European greatness with the expectation of universal appreciation https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TxsVroiUHik - Moving away from universal acceptance with recognition of its impossibility - Len Ang's 'Who Needs Cultural Research' "Culture in cultural studies relates to the production and negotiation of meaning and value, and this is an ongoing, plural, often conflictive process taking place in all dimensions of social activity." - Some schools of thought see the value of culture to be dependent on context

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Lecture Notes: Culture, Identity and Power

Week 2 Learning Objectives

- Be able to articulate how varying forms of culture can be evaluated with regard to their qualities, how they influence people's social identities and the role they might play in upholding or resisting social power (ideology/hegemony).
- Be able to engage in cultural criticism and justify one's perspective.

Contentions: • Social factors inevitably shape cultural identity resulting in a fluid and changeable sense of self • The intersectional nature of and internal discourse within culture means that any feeling of true belonging is merely an illusion • Culture and identity are intrinsically linked based on their unavoidable reliance on one another • Cultural negotiation, belonging or exclusion is largely a product of class experience • Power roles are inherently reflected in the perceived appreciate of some cultural categories above others • Cultural belonging is a product of power struggle and exploitation of system • It remains unclear to what extent we can really detach from the influence of popular culture and the values its shares • Cultural value is a product of cyclical desperation for power and representation • Whether fictional or realistic, we trying to make sense of representation of the world and the people that inhabit it • Culture can suggest change and revolution whilst implicitly reinforcing the norm, creating the illusory sense of progression
Culture as the negotiation of identiy - Linked to sense of self - Appearance of belonging but reality= complex, plural, intersectional->undefinable - Seen as a script for social performance with subjects who 'live' it - Do we derive a sense of self (identity) and the wold through culture?
Identity

- Bounded with culture- our characteristics may depend on our cultural categories
- Common sense views:
    1. Grouping by characteristics: commonalities
    2. Fixed/ essentialist
    3. Group belonging
    4. Personal level- unchangeable core separate from public identity
- Gripsrud: identity is unstable, multiple and diverse
- Material and social factors shape identity e.g class, gender, race = segmentation ?
- Relationships between identity and power: inclusion, exclusion, social roles- are these ASSUMED or ASSIGNED

CASE STUDY: 'Life's a Beach,' Beach Culture and Australian Identity
- Significance in Australian culture:
    - Reflects what others think of us
    - Mateship, family, friends, social bonds
    - Transcends class barriers
    - Reflective of separation from reality
- Norms and Behaviours:
    - Lacking clothing (contrast to day to day life)
    - Release from normality
    - Idealisation of beach image e.g tanning
- How we perform roles and identities
    - Gender norms (bikinis, muscles)
    - Hero of lifeguard e.g Bondi Rescue
- Does beach culture express Australian ideals and values?

Meanings, myths and cultural codes of beach culture
- Ideals of beach and values heightened: larrikinism, mateship, 'lucky country' myth
- Reinforces social power

"As a means of controlling differently racialized populations enclosed within the borders of a given society, white subjects are disciplined, though to different degrees, to invest in the nation as their possession. (…) In this way performativity functions as a disciplinary technique that enables the white male subject to be imbued with a sense of belonging and ownership produced by a possessive logic that presupposes cultural familiarity and commonality applied to social action." Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) 'Bodies that Matter on the Beach' in The white possessive: Property, power, and indigenous sovereignty. Uni of Minnesota Press, pp. 33-46

Questions to ponder
- Does representation fit with rest of discourse within Australian culture- what if you do not reflect this image
- Selective coding and construction of reality
- What significance do we attribute to the power to represent?
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yGdj1TwBU1w&vl=en: How might you interpret this text in its current social context of 'Australia/Invasion Day'?
- Australia day lamb add: Questions of representation

The Birmingham School
- 'Culturalists' see link between culture and identity
- Culture as 'lived' and a product of people in a particular place and time
- Popular culture largely belongs to middle class demographic
- Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (1968-2002) based on interdisciplinary practises
- Analysing how different groups function
- Meaning relative to context of people who value it: situational value= subculture
- Society changes so: Discourse over negotiation of meaning and identity
- Clarke et al. Resistance Through Rituals Dick Hebdidge, Subculture: The Meaning of Style Explores example of punks (symbolic resistance) V mainstream
- Collective identities of resistance in opposition to popular culture

Beyond Birmingham
- Criticism: White European interpretations of what is popular (Paul Gilroy)
- Issue of taking female culture seriously and necessity of representing more forms (Angie McRobbie)
- Problems still remain: how do we decide what has value?

Culture as Domination? From Ideology to Hegemony
- Culture "stabilises power or domination" (Stuart Hall)
- Certain people benefit more from culture than others: processes of consciousness
- Ideology- system of beliefs, ideas, ideals
- Hegemony- leadership or dominance especially a country or social group over others

Ideology: Roots in Marxism (1818-1883)
- Modes of production: feudalism, capitalism, communism
- For there to be high levels of inequality there must be a guiding force that drivers continuation e.g religion
- Dominates the mental life of society via culture

"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness." Preface' to the 1859 A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy

"For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones." The German Ideology

Issues with Marxism
1. Can all pop culture actually convey the same meaning? Variety of (or potential) voices
2. Relies on the assumption that we accept and are passive consumers of dominance
- Raises questions: can we ever detach from culture? Do we have a choice in what we absorb or adopt?

Dominant Ideologies manipulate through culture

Mode of production → Forms of Culture → Consciousness → (cycle back to Mode of production)
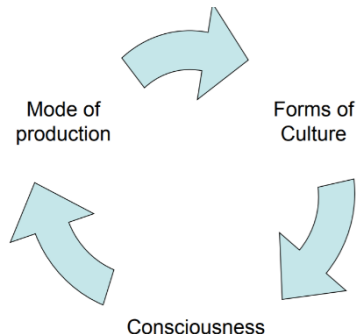
Louis Althusser
- Ideology= consciousness

"Ideology is when 'Men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in imaginary form.' In essay 'Ideology and ideological state apparatuses", 1971 IDEOLOGIES CREATE FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS?
- E.g representation of life through media- Reality TV, dominant cultures of world
- E.g game shows: promise of consumer benefits V action and actually changing world

Mass Culture as Ideology? Frankfurt School
- Post WW2 Mass culture= status quo
- Commodities of the industry produce:
  - Cultural homogeneity
  - Predictability
  - Standardisation (with illusion of uniqueness)
  - Consumer culture= distraction from real state of the world

"The irresistible output of the entertainment and information industry carry with them prescribed attitudes and habits, certain intellectual and emotional reactions which bind the consumers more or less pleasantly to the producers and,

through the latter, to the whole. The products indoctrinate and manipulate; they produce a false consciousness which is immune against its falsehood ... it becomes a way of life. It is a good way of life - much better than before - and as a good way of life it militates against qualitative change." Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man, 1963

Hegemony: the struggle over dominant meanings that hold sway in context Gramsci
- Society and culture is a sphere of change and struggle
- Universality of common sense can be resisted, changed, adapted e.g counter culture in 60's Peace and Love
- Culture is marked by dynamics of resistance
- In today's context: online freedom of expression
- Values change with resistance by = cycle of dominance with

"Counterculture alternative and experimental values became key to consumer culture?" (Thomas Frank The Conquest of Cool)

CASE STUDY: Romantic Fiction: ideology, identity, meaning
- To what extent are gender ideologies expressed through culture
- Stock ideas of womanhood

Gender Ideologies in a Patriarchal Society

"What is a domesticated woman? A female of the species. The one explanation is as good as the other. A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations." Gayle Rubin
- Men and women assumed with different skills/ values/ abilities
- These roles reinforced in culture

Patriarchal Society/ Culture
- Systematic relations of domination
- Patriarchal ideologies hold this up in culture   Hollywood = ritual reinforcement
- E.g female purpose: to be gazed upon – an image for men
- Systematic social relations of domination created both explicitly and implicitly

"Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning." Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Screen16.3 Autumn 1975

Ideology and Hegemony in Context
- Ideology- in a given social context there are dominant ideologies of gender
- Hegemony- these dominant concepts of gender can change and be challenged
- So does patriarchy adapt or is there actually deep seated changed to gender relations and representation?

Janice Radway- examination of 'cheap' erotic romance books

"The ideal heroine's thinly disguised sexuality and more explicitly developed rebelliousness do not threaten the reader, in the large part because the fact of her true femininity is never left in doubt" Janice Radway Reading the Romance
- BUT there appears to be situational value beyond the reinforcement of patriarchy
- Does this result in the continuation of patriarchy?
- Social values continue to reinforce gendered norms
- More nuanced however, in context= different perspective and value
- Can't write off the macro affect of ideology no matter how harmful
- Allows for women to construct an image of self-improvement

Romance as Contradictory
- Culture is contradictory "oppositional act of momentary release"
- New possibilities of personhood
- Discourse between a better world and reinforcing the same values that make aspects of our lives so undesirable in the first place
- Reinforces the status quo whilst resisting the status quo

Week 2 Blog Post