

Gender, Popular Culture, & Youth Culture

[Tuesday 15:15 – 16:45 room: P24]

Aims:

This course aims to provide students with some of the key concepts and discussions in the field of popular culture, subculture studies, youth and consumerism studies.

Chicago ethnographers proposed that society is not a coherent whole abiding by the same set of rules and ideals; the great American metropolises produced subgroups and social types which were seen as threatening the conventional moral order and property laws. Out of the immigrant neighborhoods of American cities, subcultures emerged as formulated by the social theorists, ethnographers and philosophers of the first half of the 20th century.

We will see how the category of difference/otherness structures the debate around subcultures. In order to focus on the youth gangs 'doing nothing' and being a diversion from the 'proper way of life', we will shift our attention to the modernized working-class districts of British cities. Further, we will understand why and how is race, gender and sexuality communicated with the use of cultural practices. Not to overestimate style as a tool of resistance, we will hear some critical voices from the Frankfurt school arguing that popular culture is a trick played by the powerful on the powerless. Does going to the cinema to see a blockbuster means that we are victims of ideology? And what ideology do we participate in when being members of a subculture? What makes consumption (either of popular or subcultural goods) perverse or normal? Does style still matter in the same way it did for the theorists of the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies? Is the category of Youth still a holder of radical ideas or rather a nebulous group defined by myriads of individual shopping preferences?

We will read some of the texts in the loose field of interdisciplinary studies of culture and society. Composed of number of texts which do not aspire to be canonical, we will understand how unstable this field is. However, there is a gravitational force which holds them together (or a bias if you wish) – an interest in metropolitan (rather than small city, peripheral or rural) lifestyles, a preference for studies of deviance rather than normality, a passion for understanding extravagance and insubordination which can be traced already in Park's (1925) suggestion that if we want cities to produce extraordinary talents, we also need to tolerate fools and criminals attracted by the city lights. Nowadays, as creativity is becoming the omnipresent adjective structuring our taste for culture, career paths or living spaces (just think of the 'hipsterization' of cities), how are we to understand these words uttered in the context of mid-'20s Chicago?

Objectives:

The main objective is to suggest conceptual frameworks with the help of which students will be able to problematize not just the hegemonic popular culture but also seemingly resisting subcultures and liberating lifestyles. Moreover, they will be able to perceive how popular and youth cultures participate in formulation of gendered as well as classed, raced and sexed identities.

Throughout the course, we will ask number of questions that help us utilize the texts to practice critical thinking. Ideally, we will be inspired to pose intriguing research questions for our future projects as sociologists, ethnographers, philosophers, journalists or simply curious humans.

Assignments:

Students are expected to read the assigned texts (accessible in the IS), make notes and suggest points for discussion. Furthermore, they will submit **two reaction papers** (submission in the IS folder). One in the mid-semester (reading week) and the second one a week before the final session (week 11) so that we can discuss both papers at the final session. The instructions regarding the reaction papers will be sent by e-mail and discussed throughout the course.

1) Immigrants, gangsters, prostitutes: new urban ethnographies I.

Park, R.E., 2005[1925]. **The City: Suggestions for the investigation of human behavior in the urban environment.** In: K. Gelder, ed. *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, 25-34.

2) Immigrants, gangsters, prostitutes: new urban ethnographies II.

Cressey, P.G., 2005[1932]. **The Life-cycle of the taxi-dancer.** In: K. Gelder, ed. *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, 35-45.

3) Youth as a metaphor of changes: popular culture and the body

Herzog, D., 2006. **Between Coitus and Commodification: Young West German Women and the Impact of the Pill.** In: A. Schildt & D. Siegfried, eds. *Between Marx and Coca-Cola: youth cultures changing European society, 1960-1980.* New York: Berghahn Books, 261-286.

4) Youth as a metaphor of changes: counterculture as a critique or disintegration of values?

Didion, J., 2008[1968]. From **Slouching Towards Bethlehem.** New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 84-128.

5) Working-class boys: Reading resistance as a meaningful channel of communicating oppression

Hall, S. & Jefferson, T. & Clark, J. 2002[1976]. From *Resistance through rituals: youth subcultures in post-war Britain.* London: Routledge, [The Meaning of Mods, Doing Nothing].

6) Working-class boys: geography and sociology of resistance

Cohen, P., 2005[1972]. **Subcultural conflict and working-class community.** In: K. Gelder, ed. *The Subcultures Reader*, 86-93.

7) Music and style: spectacular gestures of (racial/gendered) resistance

Cosgrove, S., 2002[1984]. **Excerpts from The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare**. In: *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, London: Verso, 157-165.

Riot grrrl, 2002[1991]. **Riot Grrrl Is... and from an Interview with Kathleen Hanna**. In: *The Cultural Resistance Reader*, London: Verso, 178-182.

8) From 'common culture' to creative economy: meaningful things and practices

Willis, P. 1990. **Symbolic creativity**. In: *Common Culture*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1-29.

McRobbie, A., 2005[1989]. **Second-hand dresses and the role of the ragmarket**. In: K. Gelder, ed. *The Subcultures Reader*, London: Routledge, 132-139.

9) Birth of 'mass culture' critique: reading the mind of ideology

McLuhan, M. 2002[1951]. From *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. Corte Madera: Gingko Press.

Kracauer, S., 1995. From **The Little Shopgirls Go to the Movies**. In: *The Mass Ornament*. Cambridge. London: Harvard University Press, 291-304.

10) Resistance through consumption and interrogating the 'romance of resistance'

Modleski, T., 1988[1982]. **The Disappearing Act: Harlequin Romances**. In: *Loving with a vengeance: mass-produced fantasies for women*. New York: Routledge 27-49.

Fiske, J., 1989. **Madonna**. In: *Reading the Popular*. London: Routledge, 95-113.

See Dahl, U. & del Lagrace, V., 2008. **Femmes of power: exploding queer femininities**. London: Serpent's Tail.

11) Perverse consumerism and the global hegemony of pop

Masłowska, D., 2005[2002]. From *Snow White and Russian Red*. New York: Black Cat.

Farrer, J., 1999. **Disco 'Super-Culture': Consuming Foreign Sex in the Chinese Disco**. *Sexualities*, 2, 147-166.

12) The right to consume: securing the 'normal life'?

Drakulić, S., 2007. **Bathroom Tales: How We Mistook Normality for Paradise**. Available at: <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-10-04-drakulic-en.html> [Accessed 26 October 2012].

Fehérváry, K., 2002. **American Kitchens, Luxury Bathrooms, and the Search for a 'Normal' Life in Postsocialist Hungary**. *Ethnos*, 67(3), 369–400.