Kathryn Atherton

Reading Record

Dick Hebdige

Subculture: The meaning of style

from *The Subcultures Reader*

Response:

What I found most interesting about this discussion was the irony in how subculture must become somewhat popular in order to have any sort of effect or reaction the mainstream culture. Additionally, I found it interesting how the mainstream culture works to make subcultures more normal. It made me think a lot about how slang mirrors how subculture is incorporated into normalcy over time.

Discussion Question:

Hebdige claims that a subculture must “encapsulate a moment”. Does the subculture make the moment, or does the moment make the subculture?

Outline of Argument:

* Subculture: the unnatural break
  + Subculture: interference in mainstream
  + Subcultures = forbidden
    - Lefebvre quote: subculture leads to mainstream culture
  + Subculture leads to reaction in mainstream culture
  + The longer subculture is around, the more it is assimilated into mainstream culture
    - Conversion of cultural signs into commodities
    - Redefining deviant behavior
* The commodity form
  + Exploitation of subculture to create commodities
  + Commodification freeze the subcultural value of the signs
* The ideological form
  + Representation in the media
  + Deny differences between subculture and mainstream culture or make subculture meaningless
  + Make a spectacle out of small details to minimize otherness
* Style as intentional communication
  + Fashion helps people fit into a certain identity
  + Fabricated to be normal or against the norm
* Style as bricolage
  + Subcultures are working class
  + Bricolage - improvising responses to the world, “primitive”
    - Hawkes quote
  + Subcultures use certain signs and the message of the signs is changed
    - Clarke quote
  + Connotations of symbols change with subculture
  + War below consciousness of people becomes war on surface
  + Juxtaposition of two different cultures/realities
* Style as homology
  + Values and life-styles fit together
  + Objects chosen to reflect values of subculture
  + Consistency in subculture
  + Rhetoric and symbolism meaning not accessible outside subculture
  + Example: swastika as a sign for punk subculture to provoke rage
* Style as signifying practice
  + Just knowing what symbols are does not allow for understanding of subculture
  + Process of figuring out subculture, not final product of understanding subculture
  + Language seeks to be radical
  + Punks looked to escape identity, skinheads pinned themselves to identity
    - Make references to mainstream life which are disturbed
    - Representations re-present things for the subculture
  + Must be some form of commonalities in a subculture, must have some form of popularity to catch on