

Lecture 1 – Recap

Raymond Williams (*Culture and Society*)

- Late 18th century. Industrial Revolution
- Industry -- as an institution
- Democracy – as a political word, not just theoretical or literary
- Class – modern social structure we recognise as class (Lower orders/class, middle class, working class). Class, not rank.
- Art – a special kind of truth. Imaginative, unique. Aesthete/aesthetics. Talent, genius

- Culture – meant a “natural growth.” training smthg. to grow – including training a human being. Comes to mean a thing in itself
 - I. a general state of mind/being. Close to perfection
 - II. General state of intellectual development in society as a whole
 - III. A body of arts – this dance/music is “our” culture
 - IV. A whole way of life/physical and spiritual. Comes to be a battleground of shame/pride

- Distinguish three levels of culture
 1. the lived culture of a particular time and place, only fully accessible to those living in that time and place.
 2. recorded culture, of every kind, from art to the most everyday facts: the culture of a period.
 3. the factor connecting lived culture and period cultures, the culture of the selective tradition

Where is Culture?

- It is in the organization of production of society, the structure of the family, and institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate. Cultural artefacts cannot then be read only in aesthetic terms.

- To read literary texts with social and historical analyses
- Historical circumstances, social traditions, and the media work together to create a cultural milieu in which certain sets of beliefs are either reinforced or questioned in the text

Banksy





Souza – “Birth” 2015, 3.1 million euros



A few ideas

- High artistic/cultural merit vs low culture/literature
- Exclusivity of access, control over means of production, rarity
- Artist vs artisan, skills vs talent/genius
- Distance from the body (Herbert Marcuse)

Introduction to Human Sciences

Literature Module

Lecture 2: “Good” vs “Bad” Culture

- What does it mean then to study culture/s and its manifestations?
- Strong interlinkages of Culture with Power
- The middle class – history of intervention through culture
- Aristotle – truth arrived at through knowledge
- Knowledge should direct practice in arts and science

Hierarchies of Knowledge

- Nadir – Functional knowledge of everyday necessities of life (food, clothes, shelter, sex)
- Zenith – Philosophic knowledge that has **no purpose outside itself** (affords men felicity and leisure)
- Fundamental break between the useful and the beautiful
- Beautiful, “pure” theory congeals into an independent activity

- Practice is no longer guided by truth arrived at through knowledge. Labour vs contemplation
- An economic hierarchy of labour can be traced
- “lower” order activities divorced from beauty and thought produce a class of men dedicated to production of goods
- Distance from physical labour produces class

- Wealth/well-being depend on opaque market forces, while he (worker) has no access to beauty
- The world of necessity, of everyday provision for life is unfree, inconsistent
- The man forced to engage in this entirely is slave to other men and things
- Man perforce has to exist for smthg outside of him
- In a field of opposing social interests

- Class Structures are produced
- Caste structures perpetuate this division
- Peasant/Serf vs Priest/Brahmin
- Physical needs are not bad per se – they are crucially fulfilled in a bad, unequal order
- In capitalism, the commodity attempts to replace truth/beauty
- Science/technology vs Humanities, Philosophy

- Pursuit of the Highest good/truth is a “luxury”
- So, we end up with a hierarchy of truths mirrored in a social hierarchy
- In the face of social contradictions, Idealism retreats – in Aristotle
- The material world should be transformed by the truths revealed by knowledge of Ideas

- History of Idealism is the History of coming to terms with the established order
- CULTURE is that negotiation
- It mediates between Idealism and material conditions of exploitation and profiteering

Capitalist Epoch

- Universal validity of “culture”
- You are not born into labour/leisure
- You are in a pure exchange of labour and services i.e., your personal qualities/needs don't matter except as commodities
- Your higher ideas – to God, truth, leisure, beauty are tested against a universal set of values we call “culture”

Desert of the Real

- Here, sameness is essential
- Rather minute differences that ultimately produce sameness
- Fashions that produce a rhetoric of individual choice
- We basically watch the same movie again and again
- Egs. Modern day ones – Ranbir Kapoor's entire career is about watching a grown petulant boy hopefully becoming a man
- Beards, Slim Pants, Coffee, Trekking, photography, Graphic Design – Hipster

- A universally obligatory, eternally better, more valuable world must constantly be affirmed – a world removed from the facticity of daily struggles, yet realizable from **within** each individual without transforming the world
- “Civilization and Culture” – where Sublime Beauty and antagonistic relations of existence are stabilized and pacified

- Culture – Supposed to be concerned with every individual's claim to happiness
- Root of Culture – hierarchies of antagonisms
- Society reproduces itself through economic competition
- Here, happier social existence is rebellion – Maruti factory, Amazon, Bangladeshi Sweatshops, women vs goddesses, Refugees vs migrants

- Culture belongs to he who has internalized a proper mode of behaviour
- He who comprehends the truths of humanity as battle cry is a rebel (Nargis vs Satyajit Ray)
- Culture – ennobles, speaks of the dignity and freedom of man without freeing him

- Beauty and truth, contemplation and intellection then are “cultural” activities
- Both sublimated and internalized
- Neither forms allow real material conditions to change
- Culture perpetuates forms of systemic/epistemic oppression

- At the same time, culture is that which escapes the confines and language of power disrupting the narrative of political and capitalist formation.
- Such escapes are short lived, and quickly co-opted
- “Azaadi Song” – Kanhaiya Kumar, Dub Sharma, *Gully boy*



Pop art/Culture

- Popular art is not art that has attempted and failed to be real art, but art that operates within the confines of the popular
- While retaining much in common with folk art, it became an individual art, existing within a literate commercial culture