

Introduction to Human Sciences

Literature Module

Lecture 1: What is Culture

Why do I need the Humanities

- The cumulative and individual experience of being a human
- Equally human? Some more, perhaps?
- Who, why, where are more/less human
- The modern citizen-subject – autonomous, free, free-willed, inalienable rights

- Political subject
- Psychological, emotive, rational, economic entity
- The Humanities are a **continual accrual of the entirety** of this human experience
- We exist as individuals, as social bodies, as concepts

- Humanities are a study of the experience of being all of these
- Individuals, social bodies, concepts
- Think critically, creatively, imaginatively
- Ask questions and interrogate existing conditions of being a human

- No separation between human society and the Humanities
- Encounter other imaginations, ways of being in our everyday
- A good novel tells a story of other times/societies/genders/races/ages/realities
- The Humanities are essential training in finding a language to ask questions about these “others” and “us”

- Fiction allows you to imagine hobbits, elves, rings, wandering wise men, magic hammers, iron suits, dwarfs, evil and good
- Humanities – those orcs look like black people!! Was Tolkein racist?!! Debatable.
- To be evil is be/become dark (non-white perhaps?)

Some Good guys



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Some bad ones





What is Culture?

- Relationship between human experience, everyday life, social relations and power
- Particular cultural practices include but are not restricted to literary production, visual and aural production, art and artisanal practices, pop culture and ephemera.

- Culture is the everyday (*shaadi* dancing, flowers in hair) and the long-forgotten (Mohenjo-Daro)
- The massive (Ganga-Jamuna, Taj Mahal-Mahabalipuram, *karma*) and the minute (touching of head with a finger)
- Continually produced and reproduced

- Literature: Written works, especially those **considered of superior or lasting artistic merit** (Oxford Dictionary)
- Understanding culture requires understanding a specific conjunction between the ideal of all human achievements and values; a common practice and a way of life commonly understood by members of a society and the new, creative, and untested. (Raymond Williams, Stuart Hall)

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)