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Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%	
Week 4: Form versus Content		

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading.

We're in a time of globalization—Is it a better time for equality and democracy? Not really, some argue that it actually is a new face of imperialism on a new scale (Devereux, 2014). Whereby, there exists the powerful few who exploit us—our people and our resources.

To serve their interests and benefits, the powerful put a positive spin on our concept of 'globalization'.

We need to stay sharp, so keep in mind that: essentially, there are 11 key features of globalization (Devereux, 2014):

1. Growing level of connectedness on a global level
2. ICTs reduce the distance in terms of time and space between individuals, societies, and nation-states.
3. Rapid transfer of information, knowledge, and capital.
4. Migration

5. A series of flows: capital, knowledge, mass-mediated symbols, and people.
6. Global phenomena in people's (local) lives
7. Deterritorialization
8. Greater reflexivity–to become more critical of our immediate surroundings.
9. More exploitation of the Third World: raw materials and labor.
10. Don't believe the hype, we're far from a utopia. Many women and children are being exploited in global sex industries and workplaces.
11. 'Anti-globalization' movement

References

Devereux, E. (2014) Understanding the media, 3rd edn, Sage, LA.

Part 2

Marshall McLuhan and Raymond Williams famously disagreed about the power of **media technology** to shape society.

- What were their positions?
- Who do you agree with more and why (use an example)?

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) – Technological Determinism

He argued that the medium is the message. Meaning, media technology itself, rather than the content, has set in determinants of societal change. As in, we cannot change the one-way consequence.

Raymond Williams (1921-1988) - Cultural Materialism

He contended that culture shapes technology and its social implications. The cultural, economic, and social factors must be taken into account.

He countered technological determinism by placing the emphasis on human agency.

I like the view of Raymond Williams more.

Because I believe in our human agency. I believe that our understanding and interpretation of content greatly matter. Ultimately, we drive societal change.

There's an article in The New Yorker in 2017 called **China's Selfie Obsession**. The author Jiayang Fan walks us through China, where Meitu's apps with beautifying filters are changing the way faces look and shaping the beauty standard.

The media technology to consider here is the coded beautifying filters by Meitu company. These filters always make skin tones brighter and whiter, nose bridges higher, and eyes bigger with double-eyelids–to the extent that people would look unnaturally "Eurasian" (Fan, 2017).

Alarmingly, people are obsessed with this beauty standard and spend hours to beautify their selfies. This obsession on a large scale makes Fan discombobulated when she reckons people's faces are becoming more and more similar. To achieve the ideal look, people try ways: through app filters and even plastic surgery.

It's important to note that this new phenomenon is happening in a culture of saving face–where one's appearance is expected to be "a matter of ordinary courtesy" for the public interest–and in a country where people have no "liberated sense of self" (Fan, 2017). In this cultural change, our human agency seems insignificant.

I'm still trying to wrap my head around this phenomenon. Is it the technology that dictates our taste–or it is us to be blamed for our choices and preferences?

I think the powerful in society have set out this unrealistic beauty standard. And somehow, we follow like sheep. Is it because having these features and these faces would open doors to opportunities and societal acceptance?

For what I know, this beauty obsession is now worldwide. What to do? Do we simply blame Holywood and the West for these white people facial features?

References

Fan, J. (2017, December 11). China's selfie obsession. The New Yorker. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/18/chinas-selfie-obsession

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%

Week 5: Understanding Audience	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading.

This week we move to understand the audience–whether they are sheep or they often are active in their consumption. A media text can have one single meaning or many more.

- **Direct effects/ magic bullet theory of communication** states that the audience passively absorbs the meaning in a predictable way (O'Shaughnessy, 2016). This makes a lot of sense when we consider propaganda that repeats over and over again 'til it's true.
- **Observational learning and cognitive scripts** say that the audience is powerful–they unpredictably take what they want from the media (O'Shaughnessy, 2016).

The producer encodes the message; then, the audience decodes the message their ways. These two processes are independent of each other.

References

O'Shaughnessy, M. & Stadler, J. (2016). Texts, meanings, and audiences, in Media & Society (6th ed.). Oxford University Press, Victoria, pp. 87–99.

Part 2

The difference between open and closed texts

- Open text: the audience can interpret it as they like–as there's no wrong answer. The text is polysemic.
- Closed text: the audience has to see the one encoded meaning. There's no other way around it.

3 types of decoding (reading positions) Hall proposed

- Preferred readings: the intended meaning of the message by its producers where the audience fully internalizes the message with no doubt. Often, this is dominant/hegemonic reading.
- Negotiated readings: As the audience reads, they resist some aspects of it.
- Alternative/ oppositional readings: a complete critical rejection.

Briefly describe a media text you engaged with recently and reflect on your reading position in relation to it.

There's a song that keeps me strong and I often return to it. It's St. Vincent's Champagne Year in the album Strange Mercy. And the chorus goes like this:

> I make a living telling people what they
> want to hear
> It's not a killing, but it's enough to keep the
> cobwebs clear
> 'Cause it's not a perfect plan
> It's not a perfect plan
> But it's the one we got

It's so painful.

The first line paints the scene of an unjust world—where the narrator can afford her living by working a kind of job in which she tells people what they wanna hear.

The second line spins us to her conscience of the things she's done. She ain't did nothing bad; at the same time, she's not well-off either—she makes just enough to survive.

And for the sake of survival, she acquiescences to this cruel circumstance of life. Deep down, she is not happy with this imperfect plan—but there appears to be no other way. This plan—seems to limit all the possibilities that her life could/can be. She's trapped.

On a deeper level, I'm mad at society—for setting up these expectations or even obligations that people need to speak first for others (not first for themselves). Especially, girls and women are often in positions to charm others. It's a falsehood when we don't appreciate genuineness.

I think just when I move myself to the point of view of criticizing the world she's in, the world I'm in, and it's our world—I have gotten to the oppositional reading level.

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%
Week 6: Representation and Stereotypes	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading.

> I learned the argument between Biological Essentialism and Social Construction – between the nature and nurture of who we are.
> While the Biological Essentialism naturalizes dominant ideologies of gender, heterosexuality, and patriarchy; the Social Construction ultimately emphasizes our socialization and social pressure (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016).

> I love the Queer Theory that says there is no original fixed category to who we are – all gender behavior is 'performative' (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2016). I believe in gender fluidity and diversity of human identity. We are the way we are because of social constructs rather than biological givens.
> Queer Theory smashes heteronormativity – and invites us to recognize the complexities of human identity and to challenge restrictive norms.

References

O'Shaughnessy, M. & Stadler, J. (2016). Feminism, postfeminism, and ideologies of femininity. Media & society (6th ed.). Oxford University Press, Victoria, pp. 312–328.

Part 2

To what extent do mainstream media have an obligation to present diversity? Why is it important?

I believe in the responsibility to accurately reflect (and heartfully encourage) the diversity of the real world, so there is an obligation to present diversity – to present the truth.

Does there need to be certain types of representation in mainstream media? Why so?

Yes, there needs to be certain key types of representation in the mainstream – in order to promote a more inclusive and equal society:

- Empowering marginalized groups: such as racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Diverse perspectives: It's important that people see diverse perspectives and experiences rather than one or a few narrative(s) or viewpoint(s).

Illustrate your points with specific examples of media texts.

When I was growing up, it was really helpful for me to see people like me in the media. As a teenager, I watched **the Ellen Show** on YouTube every day (and somehow I learned English and celebrity culture).

I'm like many people, seeing Ellen means a lot to me. People call Ellen a 'she' and I do identify with that characteristic of being a "butch" lesbian.

Meanwhile, in our culture, the lives of lesbians are shaped differently in the media. One is pushed to identify as transgender to perform male roles. As the unnecessary saying goes, There's always a male role in any relationship.

Our media did make a cruel effort to include LGBTQ+ people by labeling them 'the third gender'. This has been extremely problematic as many people in the LGBTQ+ community have spoken up against this wrong label. For me personally, to be 'the third gender' is no longer being a 'proper' woman. One's womanhood/ manhood is rejected.

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%

Week 7: Celebrities and Celebritization	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading.

In cyber society, the parasocial interaction between celebrities and their fans is now experienced as less imaginary and more real (van, 2018). For example, a celebrity posts an Instagram photo, and the fans react. This interaction is more direct than before–when celebrities had to rely on the press to get their info out there.

There is also an interesting interplay between ordinariness and extra-ordinariness. Celebrities and politicians can 'perform ordinariness' to get people to like them (van, 2018) while cultivating the status of being extraordinary people.

It's no surprise to learn that in China, celebrities have to live up to the expectation of being role models for "public emulation"(van, 2018). But this expectation can go too far into trapping people in the unrealistic image of "idealized" figures–therefore, authenticity is lost in life.

References

van, K. R. (2018). Celebrity society : The struggle for attention. Taylor & Francis Group.

Part 2

What impacts do celebrities have on how you understand society and yourself?

Celebrities' visibility and recognition have the power to boost the level of oughtness of social norms–of what we think are normal pathways in our society. Also, celebrities become talking-points that we engage in our everyday lives.

I think I have developed one-sided parasocial relationships with certain celebrities. So much that these certain celebrities have become my heroes and I cannot live without their work and knowing how they're doing.

• Choose a celebrity text (e.g., a magazine cover, a perfume ad) and briefly describe it: a denotation. Briefly analyse this text taking:

- **Denotation:** On the cover of Guitar magazine, St. Vincent is (so powerful) holding her own signature guitar! She is (so beautiful) fully clothed in a dress which is printed an exotic bikini.
- **An ideological approach:** This text shows a strong expression of feminism—of sex and power. It empowers female guitarists but at the same time, mocks the sex machine in popular culture which objectifies women. Additionally, from her dazzling look, as a musician, she doesn't aim to please anybody, but she plays for herself.
- **A political economy approach**: This text goes against the popular practice of money-making that sex sells. But it can also be read as she owns her sexuality and expresses it the way she chooses. Also, while society celebrates self-made women, the way she holds her own signature guitar says that she's in power and gets to decide what power looks like on her.

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%
Week 8: Making Sense of Taste	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading.

Some see that the hierarchy of rewards would still exist because talent is not evenly (and fairly) distributed (or recognized) (van et al., 2014). Therefore, the stratification system runs as sorting individuals according to conventional standardized "abilities" (van et al., 2014). As a result, the so-called "talented" are more in demand for highly-reward responsible positions (van et al., 2014).

This is meritocracy. Where people earn from their abilities (to do good work). This meritocracy is an ideal society (van et al., 2014).

As social hierarchy exists, there are four types of capital:
- Economic capital
- Cultural capital
- Social capital
- Symbolic capital (such as IELTS)

References

van Krieken, R., Habibis, D., Smith, P., Hutchins, B., Martin, G. & Maton, K. (2014). Sociology (5th ed.). Pearson. NSW.

Part 2

What is your favourite film, TV series or videogame?

My all-time favorite film is **Reality Bites (1994)**. The movie is older than me. It is an iconic American movie which is said to successfully capture accurately the soulful angst of the twenty-somethings of that era.

Why do you like it?

Winona Ryder in the movie is probably the most gorgeous female I have ever seen. Apart from this, these are a few reasons why I like the movie:

- I love the color and the way the movie is filmed–its cinematic language.
- 90s counterculture in America.
- Ethan Hawke, too. Very handsome.
- It's about how college graduates don't find the assuring security and comfort in a capitalist world–How society is not a meritocracy. Many lovely individuals just don't make it.
- It's an indie film with anti-heroes!

Is there a context (a time/place/audience) where it might be considered 'good taste' and another where it would be considered 'bad taste'? Give specific examples/justification

It is "good taste" in the context of discussing social issues like consumerism, relationships, and the pursuit of happiness–through the lens of irony and sarcasm.

Perhaps, it is "bad taste" because it lacks epic gravitas or groundbreaking storytelling. The success of the movie depends on its humor (often times on certain sensitive topics); when one don't get the jokes or don't find it funny enough, the movie just doesn't work. Also, the narrative is quite typical and predictable: a love triangle.

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%
Week 9: How Media Changes	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading

I give up on this week's reading because it is too difficult and hella long.

Part 2

Do we want media to "disappear"? Why/why not?

I don't want media to disappear. I need media every now and then. I not only rely on media for entertainment but also for information and knowledge. Social media plays a big part in my life and how I connect socially with people and society. Also, from the things I find in media, I form my point of view and even identity.

What are some specific examples of converged media that you have engaged with lately? Be sure to note how they demonstrate convergence (i.e. what media forms/technologies do they merge?).

First, Spotify. I listen to high-quality music with lyrics on screen and artist information. I have access to so many albums and I can create and share my own playlists. Spotify is a convergence of streaming technology, recommendation algorithms, cloud storage, and mobile and web applications.

Second, Google Play Ebook. I get to read ebooks online on all of my devices. I have access to Google Play bookstore which has some books I cannot find in physical bookstores. I save a lot of time searching and purchasing books. Google Play Ebook is a convergence of digital dictionary, digital publishing, cloud storage, and mobile and web applications.

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%

Week 10: Authenticity and Media	

Part 1

What is an 'authentic'/original piece of art you have seen?

By 'authenticity', Benjamin meant, in terms of photography, copies of prints are made countlessly, and to ask for the 'authentic' print would make no sense (1936). I understand this 'authenticity' as the unique existence of a work.

But, I mostly (if not only) see and have access to arts online. Can a live music performance of 'Los Ageless' by St. Vincent on The Ellen Show's YouTube channel be considered 'authentic'? Hmm, yes? Because it is the official publication of the work, though online.

Did it have an 'aura', as Benjamin claims? How so/why not?

It is a live music performance with live audiences on a live talk show, but it was also taped for TV and later distributed on the show's YouTube channel.

I can still see St. Vincent's aura. If I cannot see, what's the point of having the video?

Can contemporary digital media creations have an aura? Why/why not?

I found a very interesting example for this case. Consider Lorde's decision when going disc-less. Her 'Solar Power' album was not dropped with CDs, only as cards with a high-quality download of the music, to help the environment. Meaning, Lorde's music is all online.

I would say that digital media creations do have an aura, in the sense that would not conflict with what Benjamin said. Because online, there are official channels and outlets that publish the artworks in a way that fits the creator's intentions.

References

Benjamin, W. (1936). The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction (J. A. Underwood, Trans.). Penguin Books.

Part 2

In your own words, define 'modernism'.

Modernism was a movement in the early 20th century of industrialization, urbanization, and scientific advancements. The era was characterized by being result-oriented, overly focused on productivity, standardization, mechanization, and ultimately, the loss of personal freedom and creativity.

What did some people think were the problems with/ dangers of modernism?

The Chaplin episode we watched in class criticizes modernism.

- Chaplin is of the working class, and he has become so crazy with one single simple task–in the factory. What he does is a no-brainer: tightening the screws. As a worker, he is responsible for one job and becomes obsessed with it to an absurd degree. He identifies the task in every shape and form and seeks to get it done to move to the next one. There were no other rewards or outcomes that he cares.
- He is reduced to a cog in the machinery of industrialization. His human capacities are reduced to getting one simple task done repeatedly. He does not complain and, instead, out-performs.
- Is he the ideal worker for the working class that authority wants?

How is modernism still with us today? Give specific examples.

Modernism is with us today in motivational quotes about progress such as 'You can be a better version of yourself.'

On the one hand, it tells us that we own our destiny and that growth is available for everyone who dares to try. On the other hand, there is pressure to get "better" every day which suggests a dissatisfaction with who we are now and a refusal to reckon what is sufficiently enough.

Perhaps, there's a Chaplin in all of us—the working class in an industrial state. If that is true, who profits from our state of being? If ourselves included, what's the hurt!?

Assignment 2 – Weekly Reflection	Weight 5%
## Week 11: Superficiality and Pop Culture	

Part 1: Two interesting points from this week's reading

> From what I understand, post-modernism is tough to define as we do not define post-modernism. It is a new perspective compared to modernism. Thanks to modernity that gave way to freedom, emancipation, and equality, post-modernism is the time when people pose questions about the overall generalization and universalist fundamentals of modernity: to force uncertainty onto the agenda and look beyond reasons, onto space-for-difference, and unnoticed dynamics of everyday life.

> Post-feminism sees that Feminism cannot represent All Women, as some women would not identify with the universalist movement. They look at feminism and say 'This is not us,' and they feel that they are not spoken to. Therefore, post-feminism aims to recognize and include these women as they have a different identity as a woman. Respecting these differences is how we achieve equality.

Part 2

Choose one of your favourite postmodern media texts and explain the ways in which it is postmodern. What are the reasons you like this text? Do these reasons include its postmodern characteristics? Why/why not/how so?

Again, I gotta tell you about **St. Vincent's** work. Her 2017 **album 'Masseduction'**.

I love it so much because it is a personal diary—but it is (ironically) crafted to be told to a broad audience in popular culture. St. Vincent attempted to break into pop music! Here are the post-modern characteristics that I love:

- **Pastiche**: The work blends various musical genres, from art-pop and indie rock to electronic and even elements of 80s pop.

- **Intertextuality**: Lyrics and imagery often reference other cultural texts, from literature and film to art and fashion.
- **Fragmentation:** The album explores the complexities of individual experiences through a fragmented narrative structure. This approach allows for multiple interpretations and challenges traditional storytelling conventions.
- **Blurring of High and Low Culture:** The lines between art and popular music are no longer distinct.

'Masseduction' is filled with experimental sounds and provocative lyrics. It's a record that pushes boundaries, defies expectations, and challenges the norms of popular music. It reflects the post-modern condition of a world characterized by constant change, uncertainty, and the breakdown of traditional structures. Furthermore, St. Vincent said her work is open to interpretation.

Take the song "Fear the Future," for example. It sounds urgent and full of pain, reflecting a deep desire for answers in uncertain times. The song also conveys a sense of fear. While this perspective on the future may not be optimistic—and thus not typically celebrated—it is undeniably valid. Her experiences and viewpoints are powerfully conveyed through the music.