

HL4009 Popular Literature and Culture

August 2016 semester

(TENTATIVE: we lose one teaching week & schedule will be shortened to 12 teaching weeks)

Description

This module introduces the critical theoretical question of the relationship between ‘literature and serious culture’ to the (less-literary) study of ‘popular culture’. The module examines the following key terms (& sets of oppositions): (i) *high* culture vs. *low* culture; (ii) *pop* culture vs. *popular* (or *mass*) culture (the 2 terms are not the same); (iii) popular culture as *resistance* vs. ‘pop’/‘mass’ culture as *consumption*; and (iv) *class* and popular culture.

Since the 1970s, some literary scholars have expanded the type of cultural texts that can be studied, apart from established, high-cultural literary texts. We begin by examining the differences between the terms ‘high’ culture (literature and ‘serious’ art), ‘mass’ or ‘pop’ culture (commercially produced pop music or film) and ‘popular culture’ (sub-cultures or counter-cultures that resist the established mainstream, middle-class values) and assess the debates about the value of cultural texts that are not of high cultural origins. We then proceed to look at the question of mainstream pop culture and the issue of consumption. Questions such as the following will arise:

- What is the impact and significance of commercially produced cultural products?
- How do sub- and counter-cultural practices attempt to form ‘alternative’ values systems?
- What happens when alternative cultural formations become transformed into the mainstream?

The module is in 2 sections. We first introduce critical discussions of the major terms. Then, the module proceeds to an ‘applied’ section in two halves. The first half looks at the emergence of youth sub-cultural and counter-cultural cultures from the 1960s, the major decade from which ‘pop culture’, as you understand and experience it now, emerged. The second half examines pop culture as *consumption* rather than as *resistance*; we will take the emergence of J-pop (& the Japanese wave in the 1990s) and K-pop (as part of *Hallyu* from the late 1990s) as examples to engage with this question. Both phenomena have an enormity within the region unimaginable in the 1960s-80s.

Texts

The readings will be in the form of PDFs and three films/DVD. You are *expected* to investigate the emergence of youth and popular cultures from the 1960s yourselves in more detail, as the Internet is full of recordings uploaded – e.g., the class cannot seriously tell you what the Woodstock concerts from the late 1960s were ‘about’. Ditto for Japanese and Korean pop music examples.

Class Requirements:

READ THE BELOW – I WILL NOT RESPOND IF YOU ASK ME ABOUT THE BELOW BY EMAIL

- **One (1) class presentation** (5%), in groups, and based upon class readings. ***There must be an attempt to make the presentations coherent – if not, the overall mark for each student in the group will suffer.***
 1. Summarise *simply* the central arguments of the reading(s) for about 10 mins; and then bring in your individual interests and critical responses. (Agree? Partially agree? Illustrations of the analysis, etc.). ***The presentation must be limited to a max. of 25 mins. or risk penalties.***
 2. There is *no need* to consult with the lecturer on the presentation in advance unless you wish it.
 3. Student presenters can take into account class outlines that will be posted in advance but should *not* feel constrained or limited by the outline.
- **One (1) short in-class writing assignment** (10%) of a critically *reflective* nature, rather than ‘exam-style’. No preparation is required for this – just be prepared to apply what you have read to a literary or other cultural text. ***The date is given in advance and if you do not turn up, problems are caused. It is not a surprise test.***
- **One (1) final written assignment** of ***between 1,800-2,000 words*** (35%). Format: doubled-spaced & using *either* MLA or Chicago Manual of Style format for documentation. Topics to be offered but students can devise their own topic.

- A final examination (50%). Format: **Three (3) questions to be chosen** from a range of options; no compulsory question and no separate sections.

Class Format

- 1) Begin with student presentation; 2) seminar format thereafter, following, in general, the outline to be mounted on Edventure in advance of class meetings (students can download this; there will be *no* PowerPoint, note); 3) on occasion, small group discussions. Student opinion is important.
- **Students should raise questions in the class** (disagree; agree; or simply seek clarification): **there is no such thing as a 'stupid' question**. Student thoughts are **vital learning moments** for the individual & the entire class. **In general, boldly ask questions: individual meetings cannot become individual tutorial sessions as that's unfair to the class**. I may or may not agree with your opinion, but that should *not* stop your response being shared. No need to be sensitive!
- It is unrealistic to expect a private tutorial form the lecturer during consultation meetings.

Consultations

- Make appointments in advance: cjwlwee@ntu.edu.sg/6592 1569 (O). Each meeting will last about 20 mins – pls request in advance if you think more time is necessary.
- Do come in with a *specific question or questions* in mind for best use of time.

Readings

- F. R. Leavis, 'Valuation in Criticism', & 'Thought, Meaning and Sensibility: The Problem of Value Judgement' (in *Valuation in Criticism and Other Essays*, ed. G. Singh [Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986] NIE Library: PR99 Lea.
- F. R. Leavis, 'Hard Times [Charles Dickens' novel]: An Analytic Note', in *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (1946; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962) NIE Library: PR873 Lea.
- Raymond Williams, *Communications*, 3rd edition (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) *Selection*. P92.G7W726.
- Theodor W. Adorno, 'Culture Industry Reconsidered' (in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 2001 edition available: CB427.A241 2001
- John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, 'Subcultures, cultures and class', in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (1975; London: Routledge, 1993) HQ799.G7R433 .
- Paul Willis, 'Symbolic Creativity', from Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993). NIE Library: CB430 Stu
- Doobo Shim, *Waxing the Korean Wave*, Asia Research Inst. Working Paper (Singapore: NUS, 2011) – also available free online; do a search. DS5.W356 NO.158 – SECONDARY READING
- Carolyn S. Stevens, chap. 3, 'The Particulars of History', in *Japanese Popular Music: Culture, Authenticity, and Power* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 37-67 (focus on pp. 37, 49-67) ML2917.J3 S844 – SECONDARY READING
- Patrick Galbraith & Jason Karlin, 'Introduction: The mirror of idols and celebrity', in Galbraith & Karlin (eds.), *Idols and Celebrity in Japanese Media Culture* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) P92.J3 I21
- Michael Ruhr, chap. 4, 'Producing the Global Imaginary: A K-Pop Troppology', in *Globalization and Popular Music in South Korea: Sounding Out K-Pop* (London: Routledge, 2016) ML3502.K6 F959
- *Quadrophenia* (1979), dir. Franc Roddam. Selections played in class, but whole film to be viewed in advance before class meeting. See: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0079766/>. It is up to students whether they wish to buy their own copy: **One copy on reserve at the Library Outpost**. PN1995.9.Y6Q1q.
- *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962), dir. Tony Richardson: **One copy on reserve at the Library Outpost**. PN1995.9.S67T667.
- *Easy Rider* (1969), dir. Dennis Hopper. DVD on order.

Note:

1. The readings will either be available as PDF files in Blackboard/Edventure.
2. Students are expected to read the critical readings with *intense* care an attention.

Tentative Schedule, Readings and Topics

MEETING ONE:

Introduction:

Key issues for the module: ‘high’/‘low’, ‘mass’, ‘pop’ and ‘popular’ cultures; class and culture; *popular* culture and resistance to the mainstream *versus* consumption and *pop/mass* culture.

MEETING TWO:

F. R. Leavis: ‘Valuation in criticism’ (essay); and ‘Thought, meaning and sensibility: The problem of value judgment’ (essay).

Issues: The ‘mission’ of English and the value of high culture; scientific/industrial society and the problem of (organic or more ‘natural’) culture; literature as ‘high cultural’ criticism – for Leavis, as a way of thinking about modern industrial life and society; high-quality literary-linguistic expression and critical thinking.

MEETING THREE:

Leavis, cont’d. Chapter 5 from Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, ‘Hard Times’.

Issue: What does an application of Leavis’s principles of criticism look like in practice? High culture and the ability to represent the genuinely popular.

Introduction to Raymond Williams, *Communications* (selection).

Issues: High culture and the ability to represent the popular – culture as ‘everyday’ experience; literature and other forms of the ‘expression’ of culture; mass culture and mass media; culture as ‘communication’; communication practices and the market

MEETING FOUR:

Williams, cont’d.

MEETING FIVE:

Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Culture Industry Reconsidered’ (one chapter in a book), in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*.

Issues: Mass culture as a problem – mass culture is *not* genuinely popular culture. Rationality and the economic instrumentalisation of culture: mass culture as mass deception – emphasis on film; the homogenisation of culture; the critical and Enlightenment capacity of high culture vs. the debased values of the culture industry

MEETING SIX:

Paul Willis, ‘Symbolic Creativity’ (essay).

Issues: Mass/pop culture and the popular – in positive relation; class identity and social values in the daily life of less-privileged youths; youth rituals, pop/mass culture, consumption and resistance against the ‘mainstream’

So, how is all this work out in cultural production? I:

The 1960s and the emergence of youth culture

MEETING SEVEN:

The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner (1962), director Tony Richardson. Award-winning film about a working-class youth in grimy, industrial Nottingham, who is sent to a boy’s reformatory. The socially privileged governor tries to ‘individualise’ and reform him, using a middle-class logic of reform to incorporate him into a more ‘stable’ social position by letting him run against a posh public school in a cross-country race. Based on a well-known novel by Alan Sillitoe, who wrote the screenplay.

Issues:

Youth identity and class; attempt at incorporation by and youth resistance to the dominant culture and class; middle-class culture and reforming 'bad' youth. (This film will enable students to visualise working-class culture, at a point just before the 1960's youth cultures really 'took off'.)

MEETING EIGHT:

Quadrophenia (1979), director Franc Roddam, a film about Mods & also Rockers set in 1964, the year of the famous between the two sub-cultural youth groups in Brighton, in southern England. (Based on a musical that was written by The Who, a famous English group who were Mods.) DVD in the Media Library.

Issues: Mass and popular culture as resistance; social identity and values in daily life of less-privileged youths; youth rituals and resistance against the 'mainstream' – application esp. of Willis.

MEETING NINE:

John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, 'Subcultures, cultures and class' (book chapter).

Issues: (Issues continue from the Willis reading.) Post-Second World War emergence of 'youth culture' as a category; culture and class; youth sub-cultures; youth, style, consumption and working-class resistance; middle-class counter-culture and different forms of 'resistance'.

MEETING TEN:

Clarke et al., cont'd.

Issues: Cont'd from previous meeting, with emphasis on middle-class 'counter-culture' Introduction to the 1950s and 1960s in video form.

MEETING ELEVEN:

Easy Rider (1969), director Dennis Hopper. A cult film depicting two men from Los Angeles who are part of the counter-culture ride bikes and travel to New Orleans for Mardi Gras, and encounter small-town America who react strongly against the 'foreign' culture in their midst.

Issues: The counter-culture and the reaction of US small-town 'rednecks' to it.

Also: some consideration of a sub-cultural youth formation in Singapore: Royston Tan's short-film version of *15*.

In-class assignment takes place today.

So, how is all this work out in cultural production? II:

Contemporary pop culture and youth consumerism in East Asia

MEETING TWELVE:

Patrick Galbraith & Jason Karlin, 'Introduction: The mirror of idols and celebrity' (*primary reading* for Japanese material)

Secondary reading: Carolyn Stevens, chap. 3, 'The Particulars of History', pp. 37-67 (focus on pp. 37, 49-67)

Issues: Idol culture in contemporary Japan: is it all imposed & standardised content & celebrities from 'above'? Is there any real fan agency? Is Japanese idol culture a reworking of what we have seen in Adorno's understanding of the culture industry – with the same negative effects: anti-enlightenment and the establishment of the supremacy of the commodity?

Introduction to J- and K-Pop in video form.

MEETING THIRTEEN:

Michael Ruhr, 'Producing the Global Imaginary, A K-Pop Tropology' (*primary reading*; pp90-124 may be difficult – don't worry too much about that – absorb as much as you can)

Secondary reading: Doobo Shim, *Waxing the Korean Wave*

Issues: What is the 'Korean' – the 'K' – that is produced in the content of 'K-pop'? Is it all standardised and a copy of Western commercial pop music?

Review of module.