

HL4009 Popular Literature and Culture

Jan. 2019 semester – Tuesdays, 0930-1230 hrs, HSSSemRm 9

This module introduces the theoretical question of the relationship between ‘serious culture’ (inc. literature) to the (less-literary) study of ‘popular culture’. The following are examined: (i) *high* culture vs. *low* culture; (ii) *pop* (or *mass*) culture vs. (truly) *popular* culture; (iii) popular culture as *resistance* vs. ‘pop’/‘mass’ culture as *consumption*; and (iv) *class* and popular culture. (Note: *Class is almost an inevitably difficult matter for Singapore students to understand as it is hidden in the local socio-political landscape.*)

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. The first introduces critical discussions of the major terms. The second is 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 we experience it now emerges.
- The second examines pop culture as *consumption* rather than as *resistance*; we will take the emergence of J-pop (& the Japanese wave in the 1990s and present pop phenomena – mainly AKB48 and Arashi) and then K-pop (from the late 1990s) as examples to engage with this question. Both phenomena had/have a presence 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 and images: the class cannot seriously tell you (say) what the late 1960s Woodstock concert was ‘about’ in detail. 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** (10%), in groups, and based upon class readings. *The presentations must be coherent; if not, the overall markS per 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. (Only partially agree? Illustrations of the analysis, etc.). *Presentations should be a max. of 25 mins. Thereafter, marks are deducted.*
 2. One 20-min. group consultation with the lecturer on the presentation is required.
 3. Presenters can take into account class outlines uploaded but should *not* feel constrained by them.
- **One (1) final written assignment** of *between 2,500-2,800 words* (40%). Format: doubled-spaced & using *either* MLA or Chicago Manual of Style format for documentation. Topics will 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 (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 not right to expect a private tutorial 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. Come in with a *specific question or questions* in mind for best use of time.

Readings

- F. R. Leavis, ‘Valuation in Criticism’ (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
- Paul Willis, ‘Symbolic Creativity’, from Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan (eds.), *Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader* (London: Edward Arnold, 1993). NIE Library: CB430 Stu.
- 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 .
- *The Korean Wave: A New Pop Cultural Phenomenon* (Seoul: Korean Culture and Information Service, 2011), pp. 17-46; 68-69 – REQUIRED 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 – REQUIRED SECONDARY READING
- Patrick Galbraith & Jason Karlin, selection from ‘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 Fuhr, 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.
- *Easy Rider* (1969), dir. Dennis Hopper: **One copy on reserve at the Library Outpost**. PN1995.9.U64E13 DISCS 1-2.
- *15: The Movie* (2003), dir. Royston Tan. The feature-length version & *not* the 2002 short-film version. No copy in the library available because of its ‘R’ rating. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com/15-Import-anglais/dp/B0007Y2ARA>

Note:

1. The readings will 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: 15 Jan

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: 22 Jan

F. R. Leavis: ‘Valuation in criticism’ (essay).

Issues: What is ‘high culture’ in relation to literature – Leavis’ view; high-quality literary-linguistic expression and critical thinking; the ability of good literature to represent society in a comprehensive way, including ‘ordinary’ people.

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.

MEETING THREE: 29 Jan

Leavis, cont’d.

Raymond Williams, *Communications* (selection).

Issues: High culture and the ability to represent the popular (continued from Leavis) – but in forms *not always considered as ‘high culture’*; literature and other forms of the ‘expression’ of culture; mass culture and mass media; culture as ‘communication’; communication practices and its relation to the market.

MEETING FOUR: 5 Feb

NO MEETING – Chinese New Year

MEETING FIVE: 12 Feb.

Williams, cont’d.

MEETING SIX: 19 Feb

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 and the restraint on its ability to genuinely express; the critical and Enlightenment capacity of high culture vs. the debased values of the culture industry

MEETING SEVEN: 26 Feb

Paul Willis, ‘Symbolic Creativity’ (essay).

Issues: Mass/pop culture and its ability to express the popular – in *contrast* to Adorno; class identity and social values in the daily life of less-privileged youths; youth rituals, pop/mass culture, consumption and resistance against the ‘mainstream’.

Introduction to working-class youth: film examples from the 1960s & 1990s.

APPLIED SECTION:

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

The 1960s, the emergence of youth culture and the resistance to dominant values

MEETING EIGHT: 27 Feb

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 written by The Who, a famous English group who were Mods in the mid-1960s – they became more of a rock band by the late 1960s.)

Issues: **Working-class subculture** as resistance to dominant, middle-class values; subculture as the ‘artistic’ expression of less-privileged working-class social identity; youth rituals and the cultural-symbolic resistance to the mainstream – application especially of Willis.

UNI RECESS: **4-8 Mar 2019**

MEETING NINE: **12 Mar**

John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, ‘Subcultures, cultures and class’ (selection from book chapter: **pp. 3-9; 26-59 only, pls note. The missing pages from the main PDF are pp. 6-8**).
Issues: (Take as extension of discussion in the Willis reading.) Post-Second World War emergence of ‘youth culture’ as a category; the emergence of consumption culture targeted at youths; youth subcultures in both the working class and the middle class; resistance against dominant values among both working-class youth [‘subculture’] and middle-class youth [‘counter-culture’]; similarities and differences between the two youth resistances to dominant values.

MEETING TEN: **26 Mar**

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 **middle-class counter-culture** and the reaction of US small-town ‘rednecks’ to it.

MEETING ELEVEN: **2 April**

15: The Movie (2003), director Royston Tan. A now-cult film, depicting two sets of 15-year-old youths of lower-middle or working-class backgrounds, & their inability to function within Singapore’s unforgiving meritocratic confines. Their (non-)academic abilities further make them seem lower class & unprivileged.

Issues: Underprivileged, sub-cultural youth formation in Singapore; the problem of class and education; alternative youth culture.

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

Contemporary pop culture in East Asia – and no more resistance to dominant values?

MEETING TWELVE: **9 April**

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

Secondary reading: **Necessary** short history of J-pop: Carolyn Stevens, chap. 3, ‘The Particulars of History’, pp. 37-67 (**focus on pp. 37, 49-67**).

Issues: Consumption by the more-established middle class youth in Asia: no more resistance? Unlike, the cultural productions of the previous section, the capitulation to ‘dominant’ and hegemonic values of capitalism? Idol culture and *imposed & standardised* content & celebrities from ‘above’? As a reworking of what we have seen in Adorno’s understanding of the culture industry?

Introduction to J- and K-Pop in video form. Adorno applies here?

MEETING THIRTEEN: **16 April**

Michael Fuhr, ‘Producing the Global Imaginary, A K-Pop Tropology’ (*primary reading; pp. 90-112; 118-124; exclude ‘Space in Music Videos’*. **Pay particular attn. to the way Fuhr frames his approach, pp. 59-62**). The reading is technical at times: absorb what you can.

Secondary reading: **Necessary** short history of the K-wave, focus on K-pop: *The Korean Wave: A New Pop Culture Phenomenon*, focus on pp. 17-46; 68-69.

Issues: What is the ‘Korean’ – the ‘K’ – that is produced in the content of ‘K-pop’? Is it all a reworked manufacture (& bad copy) of standardised Western commercial pop music? Adorno applies here? Consumption by the newer emerging middle-class youth in Asia.

Review of module.